

Perfected In Grace: The Source and Summit of Christian Life

Deacon Jim Munno — 2024-03-21

As in prior weeks, we will make good use of the excellent slides Deacon Jim provided, which can be found on the talk web page [HERE](#) or linked [DIRECTLY](#). Deacon Jim reminded us that everything he has been talking about these last weeks has pointed to the one theme that God is working in us, with our cooperation to divinize us, to make us like Him. The transformation that happens in us is so much more than forgiveness of sins. He then told us briefly what the talk was not about because he is talking to an audience that has taken in that the Eucharist is truly the body and blood, soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. We all have a devotion and a belief in, and a worship of the Eucharist, knowing what it is. In the theme of "perfected in grace," we have been building up until now, God is working to divinize us via baptism, charismatic gifts, the life of virtue and the life in Christ. All are absolutely essential and the Eucharist is at the forefront of all. The Eucharist sustains it all, and strengthens it. Everything we have been talking about until now is caught up in and made better by the Eucharist. In this talk, Deacon Jim is going to rely heavily on passages from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), because it beautifully draws together both direct scriptural references to the Eucharist and words written by the Church fathers based on the scriptures. Before going into the review, Deacon Jim outlined today's talk, (slide 3), telling us that the Eucharist is inseparable from the liturgy, and we are going to focus on some of the fruits of the Eucharist that emphasize God working to divinize us, (there are many, many more fruits). Deacon Jim asked us to keep in mind that the Eucharist, our sharing in Christ's divinity for us, is only made possible through the fact that He first shared in our humanity. Bit by bit by bit, God makes us more Christ-like. Because of this change in us, every experience of Him in the Eucharist is somehow new.

REVIEW - THEOSIS, DEIFICATION, DIVINIZATION — Theosis begins at baptism. Our soul is "rendered an object of His delight" (paraphrased from St. John Chrysostom). We are grafted onto Him. We become a new creation, incorporated into the Mystical Body of Christ. We become people of God, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). If we cooperate with the Holy Spirit, that life of Christ in us can accomplish all the work that is God's plan from the beginning. We grow in goodness through the moral virtues. In cooperation with the Holy Spirit, we live the life of virtue. Our participation in the life of virtue helps to bring to life the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is no less true for our participation in the Eucharist. The gifts of the Spirit are bound together in love. The practice of the life of virtue is key to unlocking the greatness of these gifts. Deacon Jim reminded us of the path from faith to love through the human virtues (see slide 7). The practice of all these human virtues helps to bring to light everything God has given us, perfecting us in love. Deacon Jim then reviewed the gifts for the salvation of others, the charismatic gifts, the gifts of Holy Orders (the one priesthood of Christ made present through the ministerial priesthood), and Matrimony (the husband and wife can image the interior life of Trinity to the world). In a special way, in that Christ is all in all, we share with Him when we exercise all of the gifts, because He is the Giver and the Practitioner of all good gifts.

THE EUCHARIST & THE LITURGY—The Eucharist begins, supports, and fulfills our participation in the divine life. Deacon Jim first went over the beautiful words of institution from 1 Corinthians (see slide 9). These are the words of institution of the liturgy as well as the Eucharist. He reminded us that the liturgy and the Eucharist are inseparable. There is a heavenly liturgy which is Jesus' eternal offering to His Father — it is perpetual, once for all time. Our participation in the earthly liturgy transports us to the heavenly liturgy, where Jesus is both sacrifice and priest. We participate with Jesus in that heavenly liturgy. We are with Jesus in the garden, we are with Him at the scourging, we are with Him as He is crucified, we are with Him when He dies, we are with Him in the tomb, we are with Him in the resurrection, and we are with Him at the ascension before the Father.

WHAT IS LITURGY? — The liturgy is precise; it is non-negotiable. The liturgist understands we are transported to heaven on earth. The liturgy is an action in the entirety of Christ, His Body, His Being. It is a complete participation in His Passion, death and resurrection. See slide 10 for quotes from the CCC 1136 and Revelation on the heavenly liturgy.

"The word 'liturgy' originally meant a 'public work...' In Christian tradition, it means the participation of the People of God in 'the work of God.' Through the liturgy, Christ, our redeemer and high priest, continues the work of our redemption in, with, and through His Church. (CCC 1069). The Greek word "leitourgia" means an action by which a group of people become corporately what they had not been before. We become more than we could ever be in the sum of our parts — we all become the Mystical Body of Christ. The liturgy is inseparable from the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, and so the liturgy is inseparable from the Christian life.

The liturgy is not just something that happens at Mass. The people of God are doing the work of God in the world. We are fed in the Mass. We become a new creation as a Church as the Body of Christ. The liturgy never ends — we carry the liturgy with us always, and participate in it even outside the Church. It is perpetual in Heaven, and we get to participate in it in a special way in church.

THE LITURGY AND US — Slides 12 and 13 cover CCC 1141 giving the complete source from which the following comments emerge. We can offer sacrifice, we can offer works, we can offer ourselves in sacrifice always in communion with Christ. This is our common priesthood. "Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy." (from CCC 1141). We are to give ourselves wholly and completely and entirely over to the liturgy. However, we do not cease to be human when we sit in a pew, and so when we catch ourselves in distraction, we must re-dedicate ourselves as much as possible to the liturgy; imagine ourselves at the foot of the cross, imagine ourselves in the tomb, imagine ourselves with the risen Christ because we are. This is what God is doing for us in the liturgy. We should enter the liturgy before we enter the church. We should sing with the best voice we have, we should enter into the responses completely, fully, as best we are able, full action participation in the liturgy.

THE FRUITS OF THE EUCHARIST — Slides 14-19 cover the fruits of the Eucharist with quotes from CCC, containing scriptural references and the writings of the Church fathers. "The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it" (CCC 1324). We know when we receive the Eucharist, when we contemplate Him in Adoration, we are looking at Jesus Christ, body and blood, soul and divinity. God is the creator of all, seen and unseen. He is the creator of the natural realm and the supernatural realm. In the Eucharist, something of the supernatural realm crosses the boundary and is in the natural realm. We see the supernatural through the natural, and our vision is obscured by the natural realm.

"Holy Communion augments our union with Christ. The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus" (CCC 1391). He shares His nature with us, and shares our nature. The Eucharist is caught up in this same intimacy with Jesus Christ; truly living in us, we in Him. The life we have, we live because of the sharing of His divinity with us, that is true life, that is eternal life, transcending heartbeat, respiration and biology which cannot last forever. The goodness and fullness of the life we have is meant to last forever, and it can only do so in Jesus Christ.

"What material food produces in our bodily life, Holy Communion wonderfully achieves in our spiritual life" (CCC 1392). All we have been talking about in the previous five weeks is nourished by the Eucharist: "Communion with the flesh of the risen Christ, a flesh 'given life and giving life through the Holy Spirit,' preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at Baptism" (more from CCC 1392). Baptism begins the process, we become a new creation, and the Eucharist preserves, increases and renews it. The Eucharist supports everything begun in baptism.

Mary was full of grace, she had no sin in her from the beginning. We participate in this freedom from sin ourselves as the Eucharist separates us from sin (CCC 1393). "As bodily nourishment restores lost strength, so the Eucharist strengthens our charity, which tends to be weakened in daily life; and this living charity wipes away venial sins" (CCC 1394). St. Augustine speaks of adoring and worshiping Christ before receiving Him in Holy Communion. The love we feel when we receive the body of Christ given up for us is overflowing love, so we fall in love with Him all over again for what He does for us. "The Eucharist preserves us from future mortal sins. The more we share the life of Christ and progress in His friendship, the more difficult it is to break away from Him by mortal sin" (CCC 1395).

A LENTEN PERSPECTIVE — Deacon Jim concluded his talk by once again revisiting the three pillars of Lent powered by Grace.

- Prayer – Pray in Eucharistic Adoration. Pray in adoration in the presence of the Eucharist.
- Almsgiving – Make your time of Adoration an offering for others, give graces received to someone who needs them.
- Fasting – Leave earth behind (cell phones, etc.) to spiritually enter into the heavenly liturgy. Live in the moment, and fast from anything earthly.