

THE GRACE OF GOD

(J.F.M.H. 7.4.2016)

**I give you the end of a golden string;
Only wind it into a ball,
It will lead you in at Heaven's gate,
Built in Jerusalem's wall. (W. Blake 'The Golden String')**

On the day of Pentecost, the Apostles who were gathered in the Upper Room were “*all filled with the Holy Spirit*”. On that occasion “*suddenly from up in the sky there came a noise like a strong driving wind and “tongues as of fire appeared”*” and rested on each one of them. The Upper Room, locked until then was thrown open and the Apostles went out to meet the Jewish pilgrims who had come for that day from various countries and nations. They were all amazed as they listened to the Apostles—whom they knew to be Galileans— speaking in various languages “as the Spirit prompted them” to the multitude gathered around the Upper Room. Peter speaks. He recalls the Prophet Joel, who had announced “the pouring out of a portion of my spirit on all mankind”, and then he introduces the subject of Jesus of Nazareth to those who had gathered to listen to him. He recalls how God had ratified Jesus’ messianic mission through “miracles, wonders and signs”, and after—Jesus was delivered up, crucified and killed, how God definitively ratified his mission by means of the Resurrection; “*God freed him from death’s bitter pangs and raised him up again*”. Peter here is referring to Psalms 15 (16), in which is contained the prediction of the Resurrection. Above all, however, he recalls his own witness and that of the other Apostles; “*We are all his witnesses therefore let the whole house of Israel know beyond doubt that God has made both Lord and Messiah this Jesus whom you crucified.*” (Acts 2.36).

The event of Pentecost was the time the Church began. It marks the beginning of apostolic evangelization, with Simon Peter’s discourse being the first. The Apostles had received from Christ the mandate to “*go into the whole world and make disciples of all nations*” So they begin carrying it out in Jerusalem, with respect to their own nation, but at the same time also with respect to the representatives of various nations and languages who were present there. The proclaiming of the Gospel, according to the mandate of the Redeemer, who was returning to the Father, is combined with the call to Baptism in the name of the Most Holy Trinity. So therefore, on Pentecost day, to the question put by one of his listeners “*What are we to do brothers?*” Peter answers; “*You must reform and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ*”. Those who accepted his message were baptized; some 3,000 were added that day. In this way the Church was born, as a society of the baptized, who “*devoted themselves to the Apostles instruction and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers*”. The birth of the Church coincides with the beginning of evangelization. We can say that this is simultaneously the beginning of catechesis. From now on, every discourse of Peter’s is not only an announcement of the Good News about Jesus Christ, and therefore an act of evangelization, but also the carrying out of an instructional role that prepares for the reception of Baptism; it is baptismal catechesis. In its turn, that devotion to the Apostles instruction by the first community of the baptized constitutes the expression of the Church’s systematic catechesis at its very beginning.

God created man in His own image and likeness as a perfect human being above all other earthly creatures. As God's most beautiful creature, man was formed with a soul, spirit and body. (1 Thess. 5:23) The nature and potential of man both surpasses that of all other created animals. Immortal and intelligent, man was created **free** and **master** of himself. God's creation of the human being did not end with the amazing potential of man's physical and spiritual natures. In His abounding Divine love, God elevated the human being even further, blessing it with a spiritual gift that is called ‘**sanctifying grace**’. Through the gift of sanctifying grace, the human being is able to enjoy a daily personal relationship with God. Through His Divine power, God gave the human being everything he needed for life and godliness, through the knowledge of Himself Who called the human through His own glory and goodness. He called the human race to become participants of His Divine nature.

What then is the grace of God? It is a favour received by God. This truth is found in the Gospel of Luke where it states: "The Child (Jesus) grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour (grace) of God was upon Him. The grace of God is given to the humble. "And all of us must clothe ourselves with humility in our dealings with one another, for 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' The grace of God reflects the Heavenly Father disciplining His children in abounding Divine love. *"And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you."*

There are two types of grace: **actual grace** and **sanctifying (habitual) grace**. The Christian needs **actual grace** at the beginning of his conversion and during his sanctification. It is necessary during the rebirth process, when passing from the old nature to the new nature. It is a "Divine urge within the soul to do what is right according to the Will of God." **Sanctifying grace** is a constant spiritual tendency that purifies the Christian. It allows him to enjoy a daily personal relationship with God. It results in displaying the fruit of the Holy Spirit through the love of God. Sanctifying grace is different from actual grace by the fact that the Christian is "continuously disposed to live and act according to the calling of God." Once received, it remains as a necessary quality of the soul. Both graces are freely given as gifts of God. Paul said that we are justified by God's grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by His blood, effective through faith. At the same time, no one has a right to merit (deserve) grace. No one can earn it by his or her works. For grace to be called grace, it must, (1) be given freely by God, (2) cannot be deserved, and (3) cannot be earned by works. Because grace is free, God gives it according to His Divine Plan, Will and Wisdom, choosing some people for greater callings than others. To some, He gives more than to others, because grace is given as a free gift, there is no injustice in its distribution by God. No one has the right to question God as to how He distributes His grace. Regarding this, Paul said, *"But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is moulded say to the one who moulds it, why have you made me like this?"*

Sanctifying grace is real! It exists within the soul. In the First Letter to Timothy, it states, *"Neglect not the gift (grace) that is in you."* In the Bible, the grace of God is compared to living water. Jesus said, *"Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."* [Jn. 4:14] The letter to the Romans further states, *"God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."* When Christians receive grace through the power of the Holy Spirit, grace remains as a required quality of their souls for the purpose of their sanctification. Mankind need sanctifying grace because sin came into the world through Adam, bringing death to the human race. Christ came into the world to free the human race from its sin by paying the ransom price. While all were enemies of God, they were reconciled to God through the death of His Son Jesus. Christ gave back to mankind the grace of God that had originally been blessed upon Adam. Through Christ, all are raised to the potential of living a perfect and spiritual life. Through the Sacrament of Baptism, the Christian becomes a new creation. He is made holy and righteous in the eyes of God so he can now walk the life of Christ. The justification received during the Sacrament of Baptism erases the sins that were previously committed before Baptism, including the original sin. During the Sacrament of Baptism, the believer receives the first instalment of his holiness and righteousness. He now has what is necessary to live his faith in Jesus in order to maintain his righteousness. It is by his works, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that the Christian is sanctified to the fullness of Jesus. By persevering in his faith in Jesus during his sanctifying work, the Christian is sprinkled by the Blood of Christ, being maintained righteous before God. This grace maintains the Christian holy and righteous. Sanctifying grace is the undeserved grace that the Christian who is being sanctified receives from God while living his Christian life. To persevere in one's faith in Jesus requires the reception of the Sacraments of Confession and the Holy Eucharist.

The winder of William Blake's golden String was told to *"only wind it into a ball"*, in this way the string was maintained tight, so its direction continued to lead straight to Heaven's Gate without diversions. Christ is both the 'way' as well as the 'gate' by which we enter heaven. However, as part of our human nature we are given 'Free-Will' and are free to use it as God intended, or to abuse it; reject Christ, the 'Way', the 'gate' and heaven itself. We pray for all souls being tempted to reject Christ.