

GRACE
(J.F.M.H. 2.11. 2017)

The old Penny Catechism of my youth began by asking two questions that struck me as most important. Their answers seemed to sum up the whole of religion. Trying to live the first part of the second question made me realize that I needed the help we call Grace.

Question 1 “Who Made you? Answer “*God made me.*”

Question 2 “Why did God make you?” Answer “*God made me to know Him, Love Him and serve Him in this world and to be happy with Him for ever in the next.*”

There are two types of grace, ‘**Sanctifying Grace**’ and **Actual Grace**’. Sanctifying grace **stays** in the soul. It’s what makes the soul holy; it gives the soul supernatural life. More properly, it is supernatural life. Actual grace, by contrast, is like a supernatural push or encouragement. It’s **transient**. It doesn’t live in the soul, but acts on the soul from the outside, so to speak. It gets the will and intellect moving so we can seek out and keep sanctifying grace. Both these types of grace are given as a free gift of God and are part of God’s design of mankind. 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 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. (1 Pet. 1:3) Grace, as its name implies, is the free gift of God. It can be merited only because God has made it merit-able.

The very possibility of its acceptance is itself a grace, which no merit can acquire. It is the gift of God, which is only given us to draw us on to God Himself. Its reason lies in the Beatific Vision, for its only purpose is to lead us to God. God, in effect, created man for the joy of Heaven. Of Hell, it is distinctly affirmed by Christ our Lord that it was made for the devil and his angels, whereas of Heaven He declares that it is the kingdom prepared for men. This, of course should not be taken as implying that Heaven exists for man only, or primarily, since its essential act is merely the contemplation of the Eternal Beauty, the ravishing Vision of Power, Wisdom, and Love, in perfect harmony, the adequate knowledge of the Ever-Blessed Three-in-One. But all that we really mean, by this, is that God created man for the ultimate enjoyment of Himself. Each individual whom God calls into the world has his destined place in the economy of the Divine Plan. That place is the direct result of God’s own decree, so that the good are predestined to the happiness of eternal life. This decree of God is the first act, if one can suppose a first act is that which knows no sequence; then by a subsequent act of God’s Providence men’s lives are arranged for their final reward or failure. Sanctifying grace stays in the soul and for this reason is sometime called “Habitual Grace” It’s what makes the soul holy; it gives the soul supernatural life. More properly, it is supernatural life. He called the human race to become participants of His Divine nature. (1 Pet 2.4)

Grace, therefore, is ordained to nothing else than the ultimate purpose of man's creation. It is the free help of God whereby each of us achieve His final predestination. Man was intended from the first to be raised to a supernatural order, i.e. God created Adam so that he should know his Maker, not in the more material sense in which our natural human wit can discern His traces in the physical and intellectual universe, but with that ineffable intuition resulting in a participation by us in the Divine Nature. For Scripture insists, that the effect of grace is to make us the very friends of God: "*All who do justice are born of God*"; "*all who are born of God do not sin, for the generation of God preserves them*"; "*The Father gives it to us that we should be called and should be the children of God.*" It is in this sense that the '*Fathers*' (of the Church) understood these texts of Scripture, and is seen in the famous words of St. Peter, where he expressly describes the effect of the promises of God as making us "*partakers of the Divine Nature.*"

St. Cyril of Alexandria specially declares that by grace that shines in our soul as "*of the substance of God.*" This grace therefore is ordained to glory. God created us for Himself, and has held out to us His helping hand to reach to the heights of that contemplation. Grace, in other words, is the means whereby we are made conscious of that other world and enabled eventually to attain it, not by our natural powers, but by God's free gift. However, as man has been created free, man can still reject the free gift given him by God and in doing so reject the intended purpose of his own designed end. This in turn has another consequence. It leaves Hell open to its most terrible penalty, the loneliness of the damned soul inherent in that rejection, knowing that it has chosen to be so judged in this way eternally. We have therefore to realize that this grace lies entirely in God's Hands. The knowledge of the wonderful heights to which we can climb must necessarily enlarge considerably the sense of our own dignity. In fact, that we are made partakers of the Divine Nature should influence us to respond to the place to which we are called. It should add to our view of the world, of others' souls, of the infinite reverence due even to the most and miserable person of the human race, as we are all, by this grace, partakers one with another in the very substance of God. But while in this way giving us a nobler appreciation of our vocation as a human being, and extending our importance in our own spiritual estimation, we must remember that it is all His doing and none of our own. He has indeed, permitted us to merit certain graces, which for all our merit yet remains His gift; but certain other graces can never be the wage of goodness, only an added gratuity due to His generous condescension of our poverty. But the chief view we must take of it all is the consciousness that we are made for Him, consequently every time we realize He has been helping us, we must redouble our efforts to reach Him.

"I stand at the door and knock", says the Lord. "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and sit down to supper with him and he with me." (Rev. 3:20)