

# **Cooperating with God**

## *The Bridegroom's Prayer*

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David L. Gray,  
*who is also called Yoseph Miryam Daviyd*



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*The Bridegroom's Prayer*

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*EU*

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**FIRST EDITION: 2011**

**SECOND EDITION – 2012**

**ISBN (Soft-back):**

ISBN-13: 978-0615451411

ISBN-10: 0615451411



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the Holy Trinity  
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St. Joseph, my Patron Saint  
my Guardian Angel,  
the Communion of Saints,

*and to:*

my Mother Gwendolyn, Grandmother Minnie,  
Aunt Gloria, & my Daughters Daeleon LaMaia,  
Daeja LaMani, and Daerielle LaMaria (Mary) Gray;  
*the women who taught me how to love as I ought.*

## ~ thank you ~

God used so many people to assist me in the completion of this series of books on Cooperating with God that I could hardly begin to acknowledge them all. Therefore, I proceed to give thanks to two of my co-workers In Christ who I owe the greatest debt. Those being, Father Patrick Toner, my spiritual Father and Chaplain Rose Marie Hamilton - both of whom have always anticipated my needs and taught me how to apply the teachings of Catholicism in practical daily living, to the degree of living for God in this life and the next. To the priest who I have stood in the place of Christ Jesus and heard my confessions and rendered much spiritual guidance.

I offer a great measure of gratitude to my lifelong friend Loren Nicole Quashie for editing these two books, and was so kind in dealing with my 'American' English and slang. I love you always! I thank you deeply Saudia Y. Mills for the incredible work you did in putting the covers together for these books. You artfully articulated the vision I had in my head. You truly are double for my trouble - an immense blessing from God.

It is proper to give acknowledgement here to those spiritual masters who the Spirit of God used to influence my thoughts about and approach to the spiritual life, and, in consequence greatly influenced this series of books on Cooperating with God.

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## ~ preface ~

Dante said, “Halfway on my journey through life, I found myself in a darkened wood, far from the path.”<sup>1</sup> I was just a few years younger than Dante was at thirty-five, when I heard the voice of the Lord. I don’t know whether that was my mid-life point or whether I am now just an hour away from death, but the forest that I was in was so dark that I thought it was as bright as day, and I was so far off the path that I thought I was headed in the right direction. I had no true sense of bearing and my conscience was nearly dead.

Then it happened; the God who I had haphazardly searched for in my youth found me in the fullness of time, and it occurred just as Thomas Merton had said it would in his *No Man is an Island*:<sup>2</sup>

“If I find Him with great ease, perhaps He is not my God.

If I cannot hope to find Him at all, is He my God?

If He can find me whenever He wishes, and tells me who He is and who I am, and if I then know that He whom I could not find has found me; then I know He is the Lord, my God: He has touched me with the finger that made me out of nothing”

I first wrote this book in prison, during the early winter of 2006. It had actually festered in my heart for some years prior to that, and then, like flood, it began flowing out me. I firmly believe that the petitions that Christ Jesus uttered in *John* 17 are the foundation and building blocks of what it means to *Cooperate with God*.

Because the *Gospel of John* was written a generation after the death of our Lord makes it the more unique than any of the four Gospel accounts – it presents the Good News of Jesus after mature reflection. It was a work similar to the one that I find myself now engaged in as I rewrite this book after some years of living a Catholic-Christian life, and now reflecting back on the things that God has done in my life.

The *Gospel of John* demonstrates that having had adequate time to consider the looming question; ‘What did Jesus bring that was new?’, the answer, according to the all of the Gospels (most especially *John*), was that Jesus of Nazareth brought us the perfect means to be

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<sup>1</sup> *The Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri (1265-1321).

<sup>2</sup> Harcourt Brace & Company (1983).

reconciled to (to be one) God ‘our Father’ through the Sacraments of the Church.

As to who wrote this gospel account, where and when it may or may not have been written, and etcetera, are appropriate questions of interest, but are very trivial for our purposes here. It is enough for us to believe these three things with certitude; (1) That the sacred Scriptures witnesses to the word of God;<sup>3</sup> (2) That the word of God is True;<sup>4</sup> and (3) That the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Truth) was sent to guide us towards all truth.<sup>5</sup>

I grouped the Thirteen Petitions of the Bridegroom’s Prayer into three sections, with each section devoted to a particular virtue - Discipleship, Vulnerability, and Vesselhood, respectively.

Section One - the Introductory Chapter - is included in each book of these series because it defines what I mean by the phrase ‘Cooperating with God’. Having explained the construct of Cooperating with God, Chapter Two enters the fray to explain how and why these Thirteen Petitions are to be further divided into Three Degrees of the Ascent to Perfection.

Section Two - ‘Discipleship’ - begins with The First Petition, where our Lord opens His prayer by first giving praise to His Father, just as He taught us to do. The highlight of this prayer is at its center, **“Now this is eternal life, that they should know you,”** and the remainder of our Lord’s Petitions before God the Father will center around this vitally important request - that we should know the Father and the exact steps we ought to take to persevere towards our temporal end.

In the remainder of the Petitions in Section Two, Christ Jesus is praying specifically for those who were ‘sent’. Concerning who was sent, we know for certain, that the Apostles (Greek: apostolos, ‘one sent forth’) were, but we also know, according to the Gospel of Luke, that Jesus sent seventy [two] others out, two by two.<sup>6</sup> From here, we could easily make the assumption, as many in error have, that our Lord sent forth individuals for the sake of individuals. On the contrary, Jesus actually did not send out individuals for the sake of individuals. What He did was send forth the Church for the sake of individuals. Jesus commissioned

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jn. 5:39; 2 Tim. 3:16.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jn. 17:17.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Jn. 14:26; 16:13.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Lk. 10:1.



the whole Church to make disciples of all nations, by Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> He commissioned the whole Church to heal the sick, and to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, rather than thinking Apostolic Succession as belonging to individual Bishops (personage) through an unbroken line of 'laying on hands', we should understand it as a gift that belongs to the Apostolic Church (community).

In the Apostolic Church we find that there are individuals who have been given the special gift of apostleship, as likewise, to others were given the task/gift of being prophets, pastors, evangelist, and teachers - for the task of building up the Church, by equipping those in the Body of Christ for the work of ministry.<sup>9</sup> By this we know that it is in or for the Church (the Body of Christ) that our gifts are to be used, and although the Body may be composed of many individuals with varying gifts - we also know that the arm cannot be sent out without the leg. As long as we are exercising our gifts, first in unity with the Body of Christ we are certain to be covered by that special grace of God, which protects His One Church.

Now, after having prayed for the Church, which He sent forth and for those who were sent forth out of the Church, in Section Three - Vulnerability - our Lord is now praying for those whom will be called into the Church. Section Four - Vesselhood - is built upon the understanding of the Glory of God and how the Bride of Christ ought to live her life in Faith, Hope, and Love. These last four Petitions belong to the Third Degree of the Ascent to Perfection.

*Yoseph Miryam Daviyd*

Season of Lent 2012

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Mt. 28:19; 2 Macc. 5:19; CCC 767-769.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Lk. 10:9.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Eph. 4:11-12.



# SECTION ONE

**Introduction**

# ■ Chapter One ■

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## OUR MODE & MEANS OF COOPERATING WITH GOD

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### PART I: THE MODE

**A**s creatures of God and servants of His will, endowed with the gift of an immortal human soul, we *Cooperate with God* whether we are in or out of the body. Our natural mode of cooperation is through the vessel (our body with soul) that we were given to *Cooperate with Him*.

### WHAT IS COOPERATING WITH GOD?

What does it mean to *Cooperate with God*? By responding to the call of Salvation, to which all of humanity has been called,<sup>1</sup> is what is meant by *cooperation* or *cooperating* with grace as received from God,

*Cooperating with God* is the very essence of what it means to be 'In Christ' – it is to be a true friend of God. Cooperating with God is the very essence of what it means to be 'In Christ' – it is to be a friend of God. In contrast, not cooperating with grace is to be not 'In Christ', which in direct opposition to grace. This struggle between these two places - serving God or serving mammon,<sup>2</sup> is the ongoing condition of the uncrucified self.

### WHERE DO WE COOPERATE WITH GRACE?

The best place to Cooperate with Grace is in the Body of Christ. The perfection of our cooperation means that we must continually accept the gruesome fact that our organic, wounded, and untransformed self cannot bear the burden of sin alone, nor can it carry our Cross alone, but only In Christ can we have true victory over sin and only In Christ can we

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Titus 2:11.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Mt. 6:24.

carry our Cross. For this reason, we are Baptized into the Body of Christ. For this reason, we must guard our freedom to cooperate without hindrance by repenting of our sins and asking for forgiveness.

## WHY WE COOPERATE WITH GRACE

Why should we cooperate with grace? For we must cooperate, if we are on the path of knowing, loving, and serving/trusting God, or as St. Augustine of Hippo put it, "The God who created you without your cooperation, will not save you without your cooperation."<sup>3</sup>

All human beings - the willing and unwilling - Cooperate with God. The only difference is that the willing cooperate out of the motive of love, while the unwilling cooperate out of the motive of hate. What the latter doesn't know is that permanently resisting God's grace has as much value as idle chatter. What the former has realized is that because the will of God will be done on earth as it is in Heaven, the best that any person can do is the will of God through the motive of true love. In contrast, the worst that a person can do is the will of God without any good motive. While both persons would have Cooperated with God, only the willing would have done so while on the narrow road, which leads to eternal life.<sup>4</sup>

On the road to Salvation, God meets each of us along the way with His grace, and through our obedience in cooperation, He eagerly assists each woman and man in *persevering all the way to the end*<sup>5</sup> - which is impossible to do without His help; lest we fall into the same ineffectual position as King Saul and pay the steep price for not *Cooperating with God*.<sup>6</sup> "Those who offer praise as a sacrifice honor me; to the obedient I will show the Salvation of God."<sup>7</sup>

Christ Jesus, speaking to St. Faustina's soul, explained the logic of choosing to lovingly *Cooperate with God's will* in this way:

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<sup>3</sup> Also confer with *The Dialogue* (1377-78), St. Catherine of Siena, par. #134 (The Mystical Body of the Holy Church).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Mt. 7:14.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Mt. 10:22, 24:13; Mk. 13:13; Jn. 6:27.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 15:10-23.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. 50:23.

**“And know this, too, My daughter: all creatures whether they know it or know, and whether they want to or not, always fulfill my will.”<sup>8</sup>**

The work of perfection begins with Baptism, continues through justification and concludes when the soul has been completely conformed (molded/shaped) to the image of Christ Jesus.<sup>9</sup> By *Cooperating with God*, we are enabled to be fully purified and conformed to the Body of Christ, either here on earth or later in purgatory, as the remainder of our self-will is mercifully burned away in the ever consuming fire of God’s love.<sup>10</sup> Many of those who have lovingly *Cooperated with God*, while living on earth, are those who we now call *saints* (Lat. *santus*; meaning: holy), and God expects for *all* of His Baptized children to become saints.

Let me make it painfully clear: the path to true repentance precedes the path to perfection, just as Baptism precedes justification. Yet, to either or both of these paths, one must be called by God;<sup>11</sup> not because we lack freewill or because God micromanages our will. Rather, it is because we can only react to God’s will, not dictate it.

In analogous terms, think of humanity as being consummately the black legion on the chess board, in which the white legion always moves first. In other words, we do not act first on anything, because God has moved first in all things and, therefore, we are now in an eternal condition of having always to respond to His grace. Yet, even our rejection of His grace is a response to it. “*We love because He first loved us.*”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, being that, in our reactionary condition, we must respond to grace, we are much better off cooperating with grace. Otherwise, to always reject grace is to be on the way to Hell, which in itself is preceded by all other sorts of evil.

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<sup>8</sup> Kowalska, Maria Faustina (Saint), *Diary: Divine Mercy in My Soul*. #586. Marians of the Immaculate Conception: Stockbridge, MA (2001).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Rom. 8:28-30.

<sup>10</sup> Purgatory is a state of final purification after death and before entrance into Heaven for those who died in God’s friendship, but were only imperfectly purified; a final cleansing of human imperfection before one is able to enter the joy of Heaven. (CCC 1031; cf. 1472)

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Jn. 6:44, 55.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Jn. 4:19.

Paragraphs Nos. 306 through 308 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) explains the necessity of *Cooperating with God* in this way:

“God is the sovereign master of his plan. But to carry it out he also makes use of his creatures’ cooperation. This use is not a sign of weakness, but rather a token of almighty God’s greatness and goodness. For God grants his creatures not only their existence, but also the dignity of acting on their own, of being causes and principles for each other, and thus of cooperating in the accomplishment of his plan.”

“To human beings God even gives the power of freely sharing in his providence by entrusting them with the responsibility of “subduing” the earth and having dominion over it.”<sup>13</sup> God thus enables men to be intelligent and free causes in order to complete the work of creation, to perfect its harmony for their own good and that of their neighbors. Though often unconscious collaborators with God’s will, they can also enter deliberately into the divine plan by their actions, their prayers, and their sufferings.<sup>14</sup> They then fully become “God’s fellow workers” and co-workers for his kingdom.”<sup>15</sup>

“The truth that God is at work in all the actions of his creatures is inseparable from faith in God the Creator. God is the first cause who operates in and through secondary causes: “For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”<sup>16</sup> Far from diminishing the creature’s dignity, this truth enhances it. Drawn from nothingness by God’s power, wisdom, and goodness, it can do nothing if it is cut off from its origin, for “without a Creator the creature vanishes.”<sup>17</sup> Still less can a creature attain its ultimate end without the help of God’s grace.”<sup>18</sup>

Sister Miriam Teresa described the value of the *Cooperating with God* in this way:

“Union with God, then, is the spiritual height God calls everyone to achieve - ‘anyone’, not only religious, but ‘anyone’ who chooses, who wills to seek

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Gen. 1:26-28.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Col. 1:24.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Cor. 3:9; 1 Thess. 3:2; Col. 4:11.

<sup>16</sup> Phil. 2:13; cf. 1 Cor. 12:6.

<sup>17</sup> GS 36 § 3.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Mt. 19:26; Jn. 15:5; 14:13.

this pearl of great price, who specializes in the traffic of eternal goods, who says ‘yes’ constantly to God the Holy Ghost.”

## HOW WE COOPERATE WITH GRACE

How do we cooperate with grace? If we understood the principle that ‘grace is *everything*’, then the better question would be ‘How could we not cooperate with grace?’ If a ‘thing’ does not exist, in the strictest and clearest understanding of the word ‘exist’, either visibly or invisibly, then that ‘thing’ does not have grace. Grace is the expression of the love of God outside of the Trinity. Grace is God’s way of loving us into the Trinity. Everything that exists within the visible and invisible realms is only in existence because God’s grace has allowed it to exist. In other words, without the grace of God, nothing (no ‘thing’) can exist. As sacred Scripture says, “*And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it; or be preserved had it not been called forth by you?*”<sup>19</sup> Alternatively, as St. Augustine wrote in his *Confessions*, “**You have revealed to me that whatever does not come from you does not exist.**”<sup>20</sup> It is only God the Almighty who can destroy both the body and soul,<sup>21</sup> and for Him to destroy is for Him to remove His grace.<sup>22</sup>

Therefore, to cooperate with grace is to cooperate with the love of God. Every second of the day we either *cooperate* with or *resist* God’s grace. Every encounter that we have with any person, place, or thing is actually an encounter with God through His grace. As the Psalmist sung, “*Where can I hide from your Spirit? From your presence, where can I flee?*”<sup>23</sup> Each moment that God gives us a new breath to breathe, is yet another moment for us to seek and to do His Holy will. That is how we cooperate with grace.

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<sup>19</sup> Wis. 11:25.

<sup>20</sup> *Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Book Twelve, Chapter 11.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Mt. 10:28.

<sup>22</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines God’s grace as moving in three forms: Sanctifying grace is a habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by His love. Habitual grace, the permanent disposition to live and act in keeping with God’s call, is distinguished from actual graces which refer to God’s interventions, whether at the beginning of conversion or in the course of the work of sanctifications. (CCC 1996, 2000; cf. 654)

<sup>23</sup> Ps. 139:7.



## HOW THE JOURNEY OF COOPERATION BEGINS

A great Biblical story that describes how the journey of *Cooperating with God* begins is found in Genesis' account of Jacob wrestling with the angel of the Lord. This story better than any other Old Testament story also narrates the struggle that humankind has in *Cooperating with God*:

*"In the course of that night, however, Jacob arose, took his two wives, with the two maidservants and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had taken them across the stream and had brought over all his possession, Jacob was left there alone. Then some man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When the man saw that he could not prevail over him, he struck Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the hip socket was wrenched as they wrestled. The man then said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go until you bless me." "What is your name?" the man said. He answered, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be spoke of as Jacob, but as Yisrael, because you have contended with divine and human beings and you have prevailed."<sup>24</sup>*

Jacob wrestling with an angel of the Lord all night earned him the blessing of a new name.<sup>25</sup> Yisrael is a compound word, derived from the Hebrew *sarita* (meaning: you contend) and *elohim* (meaning: divine beings); together they mean - 'one who struggles/contends with God'. Each one of us is *Israel* as well, and we have earned that name due to our struggling, fighting, and turning our back to the Lord, night and day. Now, please do not misunderstand me. This battle of wills (our self-will against the will of God) is very much necessary - in fact, it can lead to perfection, or as much of perfection as God's grace will allow each of us to have during our pilgrimage here on earth. It is necessary because wrestling with God is the only way to discover that His will is greater than ours is. It is the only way to discover that *Cooperating with God* is better than dictating to God.

Through *Cooperating with God* we help Him into making us the person that His perfect will desires us to be. Yet, the good news of the Kingdom of God is that we do not have to be like Jacob for the rest of our life. In fact, our very nature, which was wounded by 'the Fall' of our

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<sup>24</sup> Gen. 32:23-29.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Gen. 32:23-33.

first parents and turned us into Israelites, can be completely healed through God's transformative grace. The theological language that Jesus used to convey His expectation for us to *Cooperate with God's* transformative grace is found in the first chapter of *John's* gospel.

*"Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth.' But Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come from Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him and said of him, 'Here is a true Israelite. There is no duplicity in him.'"*<sup>26</sup>

This is how the journey to discipleship In Christ begins. Jacob was a man not even looking to have an encounter with God and was so blind that he did not realize that he was having one. In contrast, the fact that Philip sought out Nathanael to tell him that they had found the one who Moses wrote about, indicates that Nathanael must have been actively in the process of looking for him as well. Jacob was given the name Israel, but he was a man of duplicity (deception), clearly evidenced by his earlier dealings with his brother Esau.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, Jesus says that Nathanael is a true Israelite because there is no deceptive qualities in him. While Jacob found the face of God during a state of struggling and restlessness, Nathanael found the face of God while being in a state of peace and rest. Saying that someone is 'sitting beneath a fig tree' is another way of saying that they are in a state of peace, calm, or tranquility.<sup>28</sup>

To fully *Cooperate with God* in love, we must be ready, willing, and able to be vulnerable disciples and vessels of every grace that God has to offer us. That starting place of readiness, willingness, and ability looks a lot like Nathanael in the story above. Notice how his state of mind, body, and will were all ready, willing, and able to follow Jesus as soon as he had heard the good news from Philip, but how he was not converted until Jesus told him that He knew him. *"Nathanael said to Him, 'How do you know me?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree.' Nathanael answered Him, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of*

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<sup>26</sup> Jn. 1:45-47.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Gen. 27:35-36.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. 1 Macc. 14:12.

God; *you are the King of Israel.*”<sup>29</sup> It is true, everything changes in our life after we discover that we can trust God because He knows us - because He truly knows us, everything about us, and everything we need. When we arrive at the place in our *Life with the Cross* where we truly believe that we can always trust God, nothing can hinder our *Cooperation with Him* - absolutely nothing!

In vv. 50 to 51 Jesus accepts Nathanael's confession about Him, and, inasmuch as it sounds almost identical to the one that Simon Peter confessed to later,<sup>30</sup> Jesus does not give Nathanael a new name or a set of keys or tell him that He will build His Church on him. What he does tell Nathanael is that, ‘If you have confessed, in faith, that you know me, merely because I confessed that I know you, then just wait and see what you will confess about me after you have seen even greater things than this’. Essentially, Jesus is trusting Nathanael to keep his faith and confession. It is true; everything changes for us in our *Life with the Cross* when God discovers that He can trust us.

## THE HISTORY OF HUMANITIES' COOPERATION WITH GOD

The necessity of man *Cooperating with God*, in effort to work out *not only* his own Salvation, but also the Salvation of his neighbor, finds its monotheistic roots in Judaism. Every faithful Jew efforts daily to become more holy (set apart, pure) by partnering with YHWH,<sup>31</sup> in fulfillment of the promissory Covenant made with Abraham.<sup>32</sup> The Jew knows YHWH as his partner in sharecropping, in tending sheep, in appointing him rulers, in defending the promised land, and in sending her prophets. Every faithful Jew arduously searches the Law (written and oral) and the prophets in an effort to be better enabled to collaborate with YHWH in fulfilling the Covenant. That is, by working with YHWH to create His one universal Kingdom on earth (the perfect society), the

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<sup>29</sup> Jn. 1:48-49.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Mt. 16:16.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Sir. 6:24-30; Mishnah: Berakot 2:2, 5; Babylonian Talmud: Sanhedrin 94b; Psalms of Solomon 7:9.

<sup>32</sup> According to Mishnah: Sanhedrin 10:1, Jews thought the *Halakhah* (the way to walk with God, as revealed through oral and written tradition) was so intrinsic to their concept of responsibility for the world, of acceptance of the ‘Yoke of Heaven’, that those who did not accept the yoke (an *apikoros*) were not eligible to share in the world-to-come.

individual/community, in turn, is/are made one (holy) with Him. Every faithful Jew also realizes the impossibility of perfectly *Cooperating with God* unless he/she first discerns a sure knowledge of His divine will.

Yeshua HaMashiyach has come to offer all of humanity that sure knowledge; that means of perfectly *Cooperating with God* (becoming holy) through receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. In every way that God's children tried to *Cooperate with Him* in the Old Covenant, through His Son, He has now made easy and accessible to all. What had been impossible was made abundantly possible through the death and resurrection of God the Son. To the Catholic Church, which is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, we come to *Cooperate with God*; we draw nearer to the God, who draws nearer to us through the Holy Sacraments of the Church. The seven Sacraments provides us with the means of adoption, justification, sanctification, and perfection, which is everything that is necessary for us to partake in the Divine Nature of God and to acquire a sure knowledge of His divine will.

For those who truly desire to be *In Christ*, the commandment from God is abundantly clear - "*Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*"<sup>33</sup> Our Lord portrays Himself here as an enterprising poacher, who does not steal oxen, but merely speaks to them in their own language, by telling them that they now have a choice. They can either continue to be slaves to their current stressful and burdensome load, or they can freely leave it and accept His yoke and burden, which are not only easier and lighter, but are also the source of discipleship, joy, and peace.

The ox *Cooperates with God* simply by saying 'Yes' to His invitation. For, the ox cannot remove *itself* from the yoke of Satan, rather, it can only respond to the invitation of accepting a new yoke from Christ Jesus, through grace, by saying 'Yes'. Even as sacred Scripture says, "*For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible.*"<sup>34</sup> Man, being unable to *Cooperate with God*, through his own human efforts, turns to his true source of life, his Savior, to remove his old yoke in favor of the one that comes from above. The invitation to fully *Cooperate with God*

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<sup>33</sup> Mt. 11:28-30.

<sup>34</sup> Mt. 19:26.

has been issued to humanity and continues to be issued, and God's grace is what allows us to freely walk through the doors that He opens up for us.

## THE HISTORY OF COOPERATIVE COVENANTS

It would be too long to enumerate all of the instances in sacred Scripture where God has repeatedly admonished and reminded man to work with Him and not against Him. Time and time again, God has stepped out of eternity to meet man and partner with him through cooperative Covenants (conditional promises) on the road to righteousness and Salvation, for no other reason than, because His love mercy for him is fathomless. Cooperative Covenants are quite different and distinct from the promissory Covenants (predestined-non-conditional-contracts) that do not demand any assistance from man.

In the beginning, God created man and woman and commanded them, *"You are free to eat of any tree in the garden, except the tree of knowledge of good and bad. From that tree you shall not eat; the moment you eat from it you are surely doomed to die."*<sup>35</sup> His first cooperative Covenant basically stipulated that if we obey God's command then we will have eternal life, but if we do not obey it we will surely suffer death. Every other cooperative Covenant since then has followed the same format (a blessing if you say 'Yes' to my will, and a curse if you say 'No' to my will). We even see Christ Jesus making use of this contractual language when He said, *"Whoever eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day."*<sup>36</sup>

Through the narrative of Noah, we discover a second cooperative Covenant that laid the foundation of the promissory Covenant, which God would eventually establish with Abraham and David.<sup>37</sup> Noah *Cooperated with God* by building the ark exactly to God's specifications, by taking into the ark every clean animal, and by leading his family into the ark. Because Noah *Cooperated with God*, he and his sons were blessed and, indeed, all of humanity was blessed when God decreed a promissory Covenant to never again destroy all mortal beings with water.<sup>38</sup> From

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<sup>35</sup> Gen. 2:16-17.

<sup>36</sup> Jn. 6:54.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Gen. 9:9-17.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Gen. 9:15.

this point forward, water would only be used as a means of Salvation (Latin: *salvus*; meaning: healing). God also promised that the *rainbow* would be the perpetual sign of cooperation between all living beings and Him.<sup>39</sup> The rainbow, with its bright array of contrasting and conflicting colors, yet blending together harmoniously and extending from the Heavens to the Earth, is the perfect sign of cooperation between the finite and infinite.

God even confirmed His promissory Covenant with Abram by passing a flaming torch through a smoking brazier.<sup>40</sup> In this display, God took *our* method of sealing promises and went far beyond the halfway mark to show us how much He loves humanity. Later God would call Moses to a burning bush,<sup>41</sup> speak with Him in a cloud<sup>42</sup> and even allow His presence to be seated on the Ark of the Covenant,<sup>43</sup> which was later used to part rivers<sup>44</sup> and carried into battle.<sup>45</sup>

For the remainder of time, God would continue to meet man on man's turf in ways and methods that man could relate to and discern through. How perfectly humble is God, that He becomes so small for His little people? The prophets always inspired the Israelites to *Cooperate with God* by first telling them to hear what the Lord God has commanded them to do, and then by telling them what blessings and curses would fall upon them and/or their community in consequence of their respective cooperation *with* or dictation *to* God. Call to memory all of the instances in the Old Testament when YHWH said if they do this then they will receive this blessing, but if they do this then they will receive this curse. The Israelites, being a stiff-necked people, often chose the latter and received the curse instead of the blessing. We also see God allowing man to *Cooperate with Him* by making accommodations for man's desires within His divine decrees; as was the case with Abraham interceding for the righteous people living in Sodom, "*Lord what if there are ten . . .*"<sup>46</sup> Inasmuch as we often call prayer the language of intercession, it can be

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Gen. 9:16-17.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Gen. 15:17.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Exo. 3:3-4.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Exo. 19:9.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Exo. 25:21-22.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Josh. 3:14-17.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. the *Book of Joshua*.

<sup>46</sup> Gen. 18:32.

equally called the language of cooperation, because it is God's desire that we pray and intercede for our neighbor.<sup>47</sup>

Moreover, as if God had not already shown man enough mercy, even in our disobedience, the Son of God was born of woman and became man. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life."<sup>48</sup> The cooperative language here is clear - if we believe, we will have eternal life, but if we do not believe, we, in turn, condemn ourselves to destruction. Being that God went this far to partner with man for his Salvation, why would it be too much to ask man to obey one last command? "This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you"<sup>49</sup>

I completely understand why some feel as if they can just rest in the finished work of Christ on the Cross - it is terrible easy to try, but it is not as Christ loved us. Yet, to heal, to feed the hungry, to teach, to obey, to be a slave to all, to visit those in prison, to give drink to the thirsty, to welcome a stranger, to forgive, to pray, to be pressed into service, to Baptize, to be Baptized, to eat and drink His Body and the Blood, to receive the Holy Spirit, and to give up our life for our friends, are just some of the fruits of having the love that our Lord commanded us to live in. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."<sup>50</sup>

Not only does God meet us halfway and beyond, but He also expects us (those who are being conformed to the image of His Son) to be like Christ and to go the extra mile for our neighbor.<sup>51</sup> How much more do I need to explain what it means to be In Christ through loving cooperation? I concluded for now with St. John Chrysostom, who wrote about the value of *Cooperating with God* in this way:

"God awaits occasions to show us His great liberality [[grace]]. Let us not by laziness, then, defraud ourselves of His gifts, but hasten and be eager to begin to take the path that leads back to virtue, so that, enjoying help from above, we may be strengthened to persevere to the end, for unless we are assisted from above it is not possible for us to do right at any time."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. 1 Tim. 2:14.

<sup>48</sup> Jn. 3:16.

<sup>49</sup> Jn. 15:12.

<sup>50</sup> Jas. 4:8.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Mt. 5:41.

<sup>52</sup> Chrysostom, John (Saint). *Homilies on Genesis, Second Series*. (403 C.E.).

## FOUR OPPOSING VIEWS TO COOPERATING WITH GOD

Humanities' resistance to the grace of God has led to many perversions of the faith, even during this age of the pilgrimage of the Church. A wounded human will always attempt to exert his/her own feeble efforts and flawed hegemony over the truth, in some utopian, vain, and deathly attempt to make life easier for himself/herself. The message that Christ Jesus brought is in direct opposition to the organic self-willed man and, as a result, we are faced with only one of two reactionary options; that is, to either comply with grace or to resist it.<sup>53</sup> Yet, humankind, in all of its reasoned wisdom, actually thinks that there is a third option, which is to create the *illusion* of cooperating with grace.

In the fifth century of this age there was an illusion called Pelagianism that taught that man could be righteous before God, without the aid of His grace. This teaching insisted that all that man needed to do, to obtain righteousness before God, was to dutifully respond to the essential goodness that was already deposited in his human nature from the beginning. We still see the legacy of Pelagianism today in secular/modernist thought, which teaches that all we need to do is pull *ourselves* up by our own bootstraps and sustain ourselves by any means necessary, in pursuit of the 'American Dream'.

In the seventh century, a 'self-styled' prophet named Muhammad came along and taught that complete submission to God is the path to righteousness.<sup>54</sup> Inasmuch as many Christians go out of their way to demonize Islam and Muslims, they themselves are actually *muslims* in the heart; meaning, many Christians would rather *islam* to God rather than to *Cooperate with Him*. They even point to our Lord praying in the Garden at the Mount of Olives, "*Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will,*"<sup>55</sup> as a clear example (according to them) of Jesus blindly submitting to His Father's will. That is a completely erroneous understanding! In that prayer, Jesus was not saying, 'Father, I have no desire of my own. I *islam* to you!' On the contrary, it is clear that the Son expressed to His Father His own

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. 2 Macc. 7:19.

<sup>54</sup> Arabic *islam*, meaning: submit/submission; and *muslim*, meaning: he surrendered from the active part of *aslama*.

<sup>55</sup> Mk. 14:36.



desire/will (that the cup be taken away), but His greater desire was to cooperate with the will of His Father (but what you will).

There are those who submit to earthly kings because it is their duty, and there are those who cooperate with the king because they believe in him. There are those who surrender to attacking armies because they believe in their own self-principles, and there are martyrs who die at the hands of the attacking army because they do not believe in their enemies' principles. The principle at work here is that we can follow the will of God, either out of the motive of submission, surrender, or cooperation, but we can only loving do the will of God through the loving spirit of cooperation. In other words, submission is a duty, surrendering is an intellectual opportunity, but cooperation is a love relationship. This is why Jesus said, "I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. . . . This I command you: love one another."<sup>56</sup>

Then there came Lutheranism (d. 1517 C.E.) and some of its Protestant byproducts<sup>57</sup> that taught that man is already *justified by faith alone*.<sup>58</sup> While the first illusion taught that we could earn Salvation

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<sup>56</sup> Jn. 15:15 . . . 17.

<sup>57</sup> Throughout this series, I will primarily refer to the Protestant Christian religion (Anglican, Methodist, and etcetera. inclusive) primarily as the 'protesting church', and our Brothers and Sisters in that church as 'those in protest'. The lowercase 'c' in church is not meant to be derogatory, but only to express the fact that the protesting church lacks the Four Marks through which we can identify the True Church, which was established by Christ Jesus through His Apostles; those marks being (1) One; (2) Holy; (3) Catholic; and (4) Apostolic.

<sup>58</sup> Sola-fide or *By Faith Alone* is the theological foundation of the Protestant revolt from the One Church, initiated by Martin Luther (1483-1546). Wrestling with his own personal issues, of not being able to comprehend *why* God loves him and how could he possibly be righteous before a Holy God, Luther took his confessor's advice to study Scripture for the answer and focused on St. Paul's quotation from Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17, "*The one who is righteous by faith will live.*" To the Latin *fide*, in Romans 3:28, Luther added his gloss *sola* (alone), thereby modifying the apostle's argument to say that it is not by keeping the law that man can be made righteous (justified) before God, but only by acceptance of Christ and *His* righteousness. He would also place the books of James and Revelation in the appendix of his new German Translation of the Bible. For Lutherans and many protesting churches, 'justification' can happen in a qualifiable instant of undeniable belief in Jesus as Savior.

through our own human efforts, without God's grace, the extremes of the third illusion taught that there is no need to cooperate with actual or sacramental grace in our justification because our Savior did all of the work for us.<sup>59</sup> The burden and yoke that Jesus taught was light and easy,<sup>60</sup> man, in all of his intelligence and reasoned wisdom, made non-existent. They were able to do it by ignoring the words that Christ Jesus Himself spoke, "My Father is at work until now, so I am at work."<sup>61</sup>

The fourth illusion of *Cooperating with God* is postulated by some of our protesting brothers and sisters, who adhere to the teachings of John Calvin,<sup>62</sup> who have greatly misinterpreted St. Paul's letters to the

<sup>59</sup> Attempting to reconcile the differences between the Catholic and Lutheran understanding, of what is meant by 'justification', the central passage of a 1999 ecumenical document ("The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification") reads: "Together we confess: by grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping us and calling us to good works."

The Catholic Church teaches that Justification is the gracious action of God, which frees us from sin and communicates "*the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ*" (Rom. 3:22). Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the internal man (Cf. CCC 1987-1989).

For Lutherans and most protestors, 'justification' is completed with the act of heart filled faith, and, at that point, one is saved *forever* (once saved always saved). Protestantism separates sanctification and justification, but since faith without works is dead, and according to them, works is **part** of the process of sanctification - then it follows that justification *without* sanctification is dead as well. (Cf. CCC 1987-1989).

Both teachings insist that grace is what propels the Christian to do marvelous things in the name of Christ Jesus. That is, God's grace is the first of all things.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Mt. 11:30.

<sup>61</sup> Jn. 5:17.

<sup>62</sup> Unlike Lutheranism, the teachings Calvinism cannot be said to be the exclusive property of one sect or another; rather portions or the totality of John Calvin's (1509-1564) *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536-59; trans. 1561) have went on to influence many protesting communities. Also referred to as 'Reformed theology', Calvinism, like most Protestant sects, attempts to postulate itself as being the most authentic and apostolic teaching in all of Christianity, even though the Apostles themselves did not establish their churches. Calvinism even attempts to boost its authenticity by drawing from the thoughts

Churches at Rome<sup>63</sup> and Ephesus.<sup>64</sup> The famed Catholic convert and author, Gilbert K. Chesterton, in his *Eugenics and Other Evils*, called Calvinism “the most non-Christian of Christian systems.” I too hold that this is the most deadly of all opposing teachings to *Cooperating with God*, primarily because the Calvinist does not need to discern God’s will since everything is predestined with or without his/her *Cooperation with God*. From the outset, this belief stands in opposition to the Judaic roots of Christianity and to God’s desire for man to enter into His cooperative Covenants. The god of Calvinism is a string pulling, two hand manipulating, and insecure little puppeteer. We know that Protestantism is not of God because God is always faithful and true, and, because God is the Truth, He cannot contradict Himself. Yet, this sect of Protestantism contradicts Christ Jesus, who said, “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or prophets. I have come not to abolish, but to fulfill<sup>65</sup>.”

Essentially, this teaching takes away the freedom that is natural to man and gives it all back to God.<sup>66</sup> This, ‘Here God, take my freewill

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of ‘pre-reformation’ Catholic theologians, such as St. Augustine of Hippo, but the totality of Augustine’s writings are not consistent with Calvin’s.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Rom 8:28-30. More will be said as to how *Romans* 8:28-30 fits into the Catholic understanding of economy of Salvation and *Cooperating with God* in Chapters Nine and Ten.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Eph. 1:3-5.

<sup>65</sup> Mt. 5:17.

<sup>66</sup> The term ‘freewill’ should be clarified further in the context of eternal Salvation and eternal damnation. The core teachings of Calvinism are traditionally summarized through the acronym TULIP, which are: **T**otal Depravity means that man cannot respond to God’s offer of salvation due to their will (in fact, their whole being) has been rendered incapable by humanities’ ‘Original Sin’ (cf. Rom. 3:9-10, 8:7-8; 2 Cor. 4:4). Man must first be regenerated by the Holy Spirit before he can respond by faith - Baptism has no regenerative effects on the soul. **U**nconditional election, means that God has predetermined to elect some souls to salvation and others to damnation - not because of anything they may or may not have done in life, but merely according to His own sovereign will (cf. Acts 13:48; Rom. 9; Eph 1:3-6). **L**imited atonement means that Christ died only for the sins of the church, but not for the whole world (cf. Jn. 10:15; Mk. 10:45; Rev. 5:9). **I**rresistible grace means that those God has predetermined to elect cannot resist the Holy Spirit’s draw to salvation - that man cannot reject God’s mercy if God deigns to forgive a soul of its sins, without that soul first asking (Jn. 6:44; 1 Cor. 1:23-24; Acts 16:14).

back, because I don't want to be responsible for it' attitude makes *Cooperation with God* completely impossible and totally incompatible with Christianity from our perspective, in that it is immediately inconsistent with sacred Scripture, which says that, "*God created man in His image, in the divine image He created him; male and female He created them.*"<sup>67</sup> God, who has freewill, in turn, freely gives it to all humans at the moment of their conception. Sacred Scripture supports this fact in *Sirach*, where it reads:

*"When God, in the beginning, created man, He made him subject to His own free choice. If you choose you can keep the commandments; it is loyalty to do His will. There are set before you fire and water, to whichever you choose, stretch forth your hand. Before man are life and death, whichever he chooses shall be given him. . . . No man does He command to sin, to none does He give strength for lies."*<sup>68</sup>

Calvinism, relying on a degraded understanding of humanities' 'Original Sin' and the ineffectiveness of the Sacrament of Baptism, believes that God has predestined<sup>69</sup> humans to either eternal life or eternal damnation, through His own selective choosing. In short, they believe that, as a result of the humanities' 'Original Sin', the human nature is so depraved that the human will is of no avail and that Baptism has absolutely no regenerative qualities. This is a very strange and depressing theology, but it worked for John Calvin and its other adherents who also distrust the love and merciful help that God has to offer all sinners.

It is true that God foresees our Salvation and damnation, but not because He has so decreed, for each of us, such an outcome. On the

Perseverance of the saints means that by God's power, those He predetermined to elect will endure in faith to the end (cf. Jn. 10:28; Rom. 8:30; Phil. 1:6).

<sup>67</sup> Gen. 1:27.

<sup>68</sup> Sir. 15:14-17 . . . 20; Cf. Dt. 30:15-20.

<sup>69</sup> In Catholicism, Predestination means both the glory intended by God for *all* men *and* the means (grace) that He has guaranteed for attaining that glory. That is, God the Father foreknew and always intended that man would be glorified through His only begotten and beloved Son, and He guaranteed the means by which man would attain that glory, through the obedience of the Passion and resurrection of His Son. God the Father *elects* His Son to be the means (balm) through which all men could be Saved (healed), and those who were made new creations *In Christ*, through the adoption of Baptism, have also received the grace of election (Cf. 1 Tim. 2:4-5; 2 Pet. 1:11-18; Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:4-5).

contrary, our outcome from this life is the just result of our own behavior and our response to God's gift of free-choice. Nevertheless, through the foreknowledge of our response to His grace, God issues His decree, by which He predestinates the number of the elected from all eternity. That is to say, that those who go onto either eternal life or eternal damnation have directed their own course by either accepting or rejecting the compassionate love of God. God has *made* no one love Him or hate Him.

Concerning Calvinism, it would be helpful to discuss this error further, so that we might better illustrate the problems that can occur when we fail to *Cooperate with God*. I begin by addressing the fact that this teaching is not supported by the message of Christ Jesus, as preserved in the Gospels. For example, the dialogue about the Vine and the Branches specifically states that, "*I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned.*"<sup>70</sup> In opposition to this teaching, Calvin's 'absolute predestination' doctrine teaches that once you are a branch of the vine you will *not* be removed, no matter what you do. There is also the story of Lost Sheep in *Gospel of Luke*.<sup>71</sup> I ask, 'If the sheep is truly predetermined for either Heaven or Hell, then why is it lost and why is Jesus the one that needs to go after it?' 'If the sheep was predestined, then should it not have been able to find its own way back to the fold?' Paragraph No. 605 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* declares the truth in this way:

"At the end of the parable of the lost sheep Jesus recalled that God's love excludes no one: "So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."<sup>72</sup> He affirms that he came "to give his life as a ransom for many"; this last term is not restrictive, but contrast the whole of humanity with the unique person of the redeemer who hands himself over to save us."<sup>73</sup> The Church, following the apostles, teaches that

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<sup>70</sup> Jn. 15:5-6.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Lk. 15:1-10.

<sup>72</sup> Mt. 18:14.

<sup>73</sup> Mt. 20:28; cf. Rom. 5:18-19.

Christ died for all men without exception: "There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer."<sup>74</sup>

In addition to that, we can also find contradictions to this teaching in the Parable of the Kingdom of God being compared to a wedding feast. The King in this parable did not predestine (direct), but, rather, *invited* his guest. If his original list of invited guest had been predestined to attend the wedding feast, then they would have, but that is not the case in this parable, and neither is it the case with the Kingdom of God.<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, we know for certain that St. Paul did not believe in 'absolute predestination'<sup>76</sup> because this teaching is not consistent with the totality of his writings, nor did any of his disciples or hearers, such as St. Ignatius of Antioch, or any of the early Catholic Church Fathers teach it.

One of the favorite verses in Scripture that those who believe in 'absolute predestination' cling to is *John* 6:44: "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him . . .*" They say that this verse proves, from the mouth of Christ Jesus Himself, their belief that it is God the Father who micromanages the soul and tells it to believe in His Son. In 391 C.E. St. Chrysostom addressed this erroneous interpretation of Scripture, in saying:

"The Manicheans fairly leap upon this statement and say that nothing lies in our power; yet the saying [[verse of Scripture]] shows particularly that we are masters of our will. Someone will say, "If a man comes to Him, what need is there in drawing?" But this does not take away our faculty of choice, but only shows our need of help, because it points out that not just anyone may come at random, but he may come who is amply supplied with assistance."

It is true what the saint has written. Man cannot *Cooperate with God* unless the Holy Spirit assists him. How else would we know how to do what He wills us to do unless He tells us and we cooperate? How else would we not make matters worse unless He helps us and we not hinder

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<sup>74</sup> Council of Quiercy (853); DS 624; cf. 2 Cor. 5:15; 1 Jn. 2:2.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Mt. 22:1-14.

<sup>76</sup> Also called: 'Once Saved Always Saved', 'Assurance Salvation', and 'Presumption Salvation'.

His help? How else would we have discerned the truth, the way, and our life unless He had come, continue to come, and come again? Yet, to believe as they do, that God has predestined some men to eternal damnation suggests that God wills men to do evil, rather than Satan willing men to do evil or men willing themselves to do evil. The implication here is that God's foreknowledge makes Him a sinner. On the contrary, it is as St. Augustine of Hippo wrote, "As you by your memory, do not cause past acts to be done, so God, by His foreknowledge, does not cause future acts to be done." Further championing his cause against the Pelagians, Augustine of Hippo wrote in 420 C.E.:

"No one is forced by God's power unwillingly either into evil or to good; but when God forsakes a man, that man deservedly goes into evil, and when God helps him, without desiring it he is converted to good. For a man is not good if he is unwilling; but by the grace of God he is helped even to be willing; because it is not vainly written: "*For it is God who, for His good pleasure, works in you both, the will and the performance*";<sup>77</sup> and "*The will is prepared by the Lord*."<sup>78</sup>

St. Jerome, in his commentaries on Ephesians around 386 C.E., wrote about how God uses our own *Cooperation with Him* to purify our love for Him:

*"In whom also we have been called by lot, predestined according to the plan of Him that works all things according to the counsel of His will . . ."*<sup>79</sup>

Let it be noted that this *proorizo* and *prothesis* [[Greek]], that is, *predestination* and *plan*, are taken together as that in references to which God works all things according to the counsel of His will. Not that all things that come to pass in the world are brought about by the will and counsel of God, for that were to impute evil to God; but that all things that He does in His counsel He does also in His will, so that they are done with the full reason and by the power of the one doing them. . . .

*"He desires all men to be saved and to come to an acknowledgment of the truth."*<sup>80</sup> But because no one is saved without his own willing it (for we have

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<sup>77</sup> Phil. 2:13.

<sup>78</sup> Prov. 8:35 (Septuagint).

<sup>79</sup> Eph. 1:11.

<sup>80</sup> 1 Tim. 2:4.

free choice), He wants us to desire the good, so that, when we shall have willed it, then He too will Himself will that His counsel be fulfilled in us.”

According to Calvinists, God did not give humankind the ultimate gift of freewill, which allows us all to either *Cooperate with Him* or dictate to Him. In his homily on Matthew in 370 C.E., St. Chrysostom opposes such a heretical doctrine:

*“It is necessary that scandals come . . .”*<sup>81</sup> But when He speaks of its being necessary He does not mean that the faculty of freewill nor the ability of freely choosing is taken away, nor that life is made subject to some kind of necessity through its circumstances. He is only saying beforehand what will surely be.

“Luke says for the same thing by means of another expression: *“It is impossible that scandals should not come. . .”*<sup>82</sup> It is not that His prediction brings the scandals. Away with such a notion! It is not because He foretold it that it happens; but because it surely must happen He did foretell it. If those who introduce scandals had not wanted to do such wickedness, the scandals would not have come; and if the scandals were not going to come, He would not have foretold them.”

In Diary entry number 1107, St. Faustina wrote about how freewill is an essential component in the process of *Cooperating with God* in our justification, in this way:

“Neither grace, nor revelations, nor raptures, nor gifts granted to a soul make it perfect, but rather the intimate union of the soul with God. These gifts are merely ornaments of the soul, but constitute neither its essence nor its perfection. My sanctity and perfection consist in the close union of my will with the will of God. God never violates our free will. It is up to us whether we want to receive God’s grace or not. It is up to us whether we will cooperate with it or waste it.”

To suggest that God Himself predestines some to Heaven and others to Hell, regardless of the multitude of choices they make in life, is to reject the unfathomable mercy of the God, who sent His only Son to suffer and

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<sup>81</sup> Mt. 18:7.

<sup>82</sup> Lk. 17:1.



die for the world He loves. What was the point of the death of Christ Jesus on the Cross if God already knew who would respond to His love? On the contrary, it is just as St. Jerome wrote above - the desire of God is that man make good of the sin of Eve and Adam, so that we not only *know* good and evil, as they chose to, but that through transformative grace we might learn how to always *choose* good over evil.

The great difficulty *Outside* of Christ is in knowing what good is. It is the indwelling of the Holy Trinity, who guides man to the knowledge of good and the will to do it. As St. Fulgence of Ruspe wrote sometime between 512 and 527 C.E.:

"The grace of God unto faith and the beginning of a will to do good is given us, and help is accorded the will itself, so that what good it wills, that good may be done; for God, who created man, did Himself will, by His predestination, to give those whom He prepared, both the gift of illumination for believing and the gift of perseverance for perfecting and remaining constant, and the gift of glorification for reigning, - God, who does not bring to perfection of deed anyone whom he has not prepared beforehand in His eternal and unchangeable will. The Apostles bear witness to the reality of this predestination, by which we have been predestined in Christ before the foundation of the world."<sup>83</sup>

The teachings of Ss. Paul, Clement, Jerome, Augustine of Hippo, Aquinas, Faustina, and so many others, are all consistent in saying that God chooses some souls to work in His plan of Salvation in a very unique way, even while all are free to either accept or reject His Loving mercy. The saints have all expressed this mystery of God in different ways and with various words, such as elect, predestined, and chosen.

While we must recognize the special calling on souls like the Blessed Mother Mary, the Apostles, and countless other saints, we must also understand that the work of perfecting the soul belongs to God alone. Whatever God wants to make Holy, He makes it Holy. The only thing that we can do is say 'Yes' or 'No' to His will. Those who consistently *Cooperate with God* in this way, by allowing the God *in them* to love on God *in neighbor* (through acquiescence) and God Himself, will eventually find themselves in the higher degrees of the *Circle of Grace* and on their way to being made perfect (holy).

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. Eph. 1:4.

Finally, this false teaching of ‘absolute predestination’ is a double-tongued trick from Satan, and, like Pelagianism, Islam, and Lutheranism, it subsists in promulgating the easy way out, by not taking any accountability of their own freewill. The adherents of this unnatural teaching do not trust themselves with freewill and they do not trust that God loves and trust them enough to give it (free-will/a piece of Himself) to them. Those who teach it, and those who believe it, lack understanding of God’s mercy and all the work and intervention that Christ Jesus and the saints continue to do for sinners here on earth. “*My Father is at work until now, so I am at work.*”<sup>84</sup>

## THE ROLE OF PRAYER IN COOPERATING WITH GOD

Salvation belongs to God,<sup>85</sup> and He lovingly meets us halfway with His awesome plan. While the work of accepting His plan belongs to us, the work of truly converting our hearts to His belongs to Him. Those who are properly responding to God’s plan of Salvation can affirm his/her cooperation with these three statements: (1) I have been saved; (2) I am being saved; and (3) I hope to be saved. That is, saying that ‘I have been saved’, is to say that I have accepted the gift of Salvation, which was wrought by Christ on the Cross once and for all.<sup>86</sup> It is also to say that I am a new creature *In Christ*.<sup>87</sup> Secondly, saying that ‘I am being saved’, is to express our belief in ongoing discipleship,<sup>88</sup> taking up our Cross daily,<sup>89</sup> running the race,<sup>90</sup> continued repentance and conversion,<sup>91</sup> and persistent prayer. Thirdly, to say that ‘I hope to be saved’, is to express our hope in persevering all the way to the end,<sup>92</sup> through faith, obedience, and love of God, neighbor, and self. It should also be noted that these three affirmations are identical to the three senses of the *Parousia* and the Kingdom of God, which we will discuss in Chapter Fourteen, and they are the three senses under which I will use the words

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Jn. 5:17.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Rev. 7:9-10.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Jn. 3:16; Rom. 6:10; 1 Tim. 2:4; Heb. 10:10.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Lk. 14:33.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Lk. 14:27.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 9:24.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Jas. 5:16.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Mt. 10:22, 24:13; Mk 13:13

*Saved* and *Salvation* and refer to the plan of Salvation under the theological term *justification*.

Knowing full well that Salvation belongs to God, we also know that God has made Salvation available and accessible to *All*,<sup>93</sup> because repentance is available for *All*,<sup>94</sup> and God has called *All* to repent.<sup>95</sup> The God-made availability of Salvation for all of humanity was prefigured before the coming of the Christ when He called all other (not some other) living creatures into Noah's Ark.<sup>96</sup> Jesus the Christ illustrated this teaching in the parable of the Wedding Feast,<sup>97</sup> the Weeds,<sup>98</sup> and the Fish and Nets.<sup>99</sup> We also know that Salvation and repentance is available for all because prayer is the vehicle to true repentance and all human beings can freely pray to God.

Indeed, prayer is necessary for Salvation and man (through his own free-choice) can respond to the grace of God and the Blood of Jesus, by praying for the forgiveness of his trespasses. Ultimately, the only people in Heaven will be those who had obeyed the common will God, while they were in the flesh,<sup>100</sup> and the only way to obey God is by receiving those necessary graces, and the only way to receive those necessary graces is to pray to receive them. All of humankind can make the free choice to pray - to say 'Abba Father'.<sup>101</sup> If it is true that God loves those who love Him,<sup>102</sup> then it is equally true that we must pray and ask God to teach us *how* to love Him as we ought, and it is through this request that we perfectly cooperate with the freely distributed love of God. Through Christian prayer we cooperate with the providence of God and His plan of love for all men.<sup>103</sup>

This journey to learn to love as we ought is what I like to call our *Life with the Cross*. This is my life journey and it is yours and ours together,

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<sup>93</sup> Cf. Jn. 3:16-21; 1 Tim 2:3-6; Heb 10:10; Titus 2:11.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Isa. 30:15; Lk. 5:32; 2 Cor. 7:10.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Lk. 13:1-5; Acts 17:30-31; 2 Pet. 3:9.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Gen 6:19.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Mt. 22:1-4.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. Mt. 13:47-50.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Mt. 7:21.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Gal. 4:4-7.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Ps. 5:6, 11:5; Sir. 4:14.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. CCC 2738.

being that we are not individual islands but co-workers in the *ecclesia*, that one sheepfold,<sup>104</sup> whose Shepherd is the beloved and only begotten Son of God. Every time that I receive the consecrated host, which is the actual Body and Blood of Christ Jesus, I want to be transubstantiated myself, at least in part. During the consecration of the Host at the Sacrifice of the Mass, the substance (the essence; gist, matter) of the bread and wine are changed into the substance of the Christ. This transference, not exchange, means that the bread and wine have permanently become the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord and what was formerly the substance of the bread and wine are no more. This miracle is what I yearn for daily! That every time I eat the Body of Jesus, a part of my body will die and a part of His Body will become a permanent part of me. I cry out, '*Christ transform me - a sinner!*' Where that part of my old body goes, I don't know and hardly care because I am now more a part of that one Body of Christ, of which I have long desired to be more fully in.

## THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS IN US TO BRING ABOUT OUR FULL COOPERATION

Read the sacred Scripture of the Gospel of Mark (Chapter 11) and meditate on the meaning of cooperating with grace. Summarizing the process of cooperating - in the first place, Jesus entered Jerusalem, which spiritually represents 'wherever we are at in our Spiritual Boat', 'our environs' in life. Secondly, He cursed the fig tree, which symbolically represents that system of teachings or worldview that we hold onto and use to find truth. Thirdly, God entered the Temple area (our body, the Temple, the Church, the Bride) unannounced and inspected it according to what He had created it for. God created the Temple to be "*a house of prayer*," but it had become "*a den of violent ones*."<sup>105</sup> Rather than being a house of compassion, it had become such an instrument of disobedience and rebellion against the will of God, that it would even go as far as killing His own Son. Fourthly, because of the Temple's non-cooperative state, Jesus cleansed it of everything that was standing in the

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. Jn. 10:16.

<sup>105</sup> Some translations render the Greek: *lestai* here as 'robbers and/or thieves', but the better translation is *violent ones*, *killers*, or *brigands*, thus striking the right contrast between a 'house of prayer'.

way of our finding the correct path to truth (God) and reestablished the primacy of prayer as the priority on the road to Salvation. Lastly, the fig tree died and the struggle was over. The truth, which we had been seeking through the clutter of life, had found us, Baptized us (made us clean), came to dwell in us, and now we were finally free to worship Him as we were created to do.

The chief priests, scribes, and elders (those people in our life who want us to stay dead in our sins) then approached the Lord and demanded to know by what right He had to simplify the reunion of man and God. 'What about our two thousand year old religion, our annual day of atonement, our feast days, our sacrifices, our rites, and liturgy,' they asked, "By what authority are you doing these things?"<sup>106</sup>

Of course the Lord could have answered their question simply by telling them that *I AM* and, therefore, I have the authority to extend my love and grace to whomever and wherever I so please, but instead, He did as He always did and responded to their question with a counter-question, thus forcing them [us] to first revisit the inner-self for understanding.

We have seen this same story and pattern of 'purgation and rebuilding' play out before with the Jews being redeemed and delivered from the bondage of the Egyptians. It is the same story and pattern that we should see in our own lives as well.

## THE GREAT STRUGGLE IN COOPERATING WITH GOD

The greatest difficulty in *Cooperating with God* is our parasitic human pride, as evidenced in the creation of easier ways - some of which I have highlighted above. At the point in time in which we realize, in a true (not just theoretical) way, that everything (every 'thing') depends on God, then and only then will we be able to rightly *Cooperate with Him*. Otherwise, pride will go about its own self-interested way, and may even try to fulfill these Thirteen Petitions without God's assistance - and thus incur self-inflicted sin.

Children and beggars, who depend on others for their sustenance, understand this concept better than the adults and the rich, who provide everything for themselves. Children depend solely on the love of their parents, and beggars depend solely on the compassion of their neighbors,

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<sup>106</sup> Mk. 11:28

just as those *In Christ* must depend solely on the abundant and loving mercy of God.

If you have truly realized that the coming of the next second, hour, or day is only your *hypothesis*, based solely upon past events, then you might be free to *Cooperate with God*. If you have truly realized that you are only breathing, walking, and alive because God has decided to allow you to do so, then you might be able to rightly *Cooperate with God*. The expressive act of always depending on God in every aspect of our life leads us directly to the ultimate act of cooperation, which is giving God what is rightly His - our very life.

Therefore, desire nothing but God and expect nothing in this life but for His Holy will to be done. "*Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish His work."*"<sup>107</sup> "*For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*"<sup>108</sup>

## CONCLUSION

At the point in time when one truly understands that he/she must *Cooperate with God*, he/she would have also understood that he/she must reject the self-will and (through prayer) would have accepted the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God in his/her life, so that he/she would be *In Christ*. That is, to be *like* His beloved Son - fully grafted into the vine, actively bearing fruit; not resting, but doing even greater things than these,<sup>109</sup> as the Lord said we would. Yet, all *very* impossible without our *Cooperation with God's* grace!

Let us then be perpetually admonished: first, that grace being a free and unmerited gift from God, we should always pray for the graces that *we feel* we need most; second, that grace being a free and unmerited gift from God, we should never neglect to pray for the graces that God *knows* we need most; and third, that grace being a free and unmerited gift from God, we must always *Cooperate with His* grace, love, and mercy, lest we be without grace and be on the path to destruction. This is what *Cooperation with God* means.

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<sup>107</sup> Jn. 4:34.

<sup>108</sup> Mt. 16:25.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Jn. 14:12.

## PART II: THE MEANS

**A**s people of God, created to know, love, and serve/trust Him in this life and in the next, our present means of *Cooperating with Him* is through His Church in His Kingdom.

No study, as being undertaken in this series of books on *Cooperating with God*, which involves reflections on the words, deeds, and examples of Christ Jesus, can proceed without first understanding the meaning of our Lord's proclamations about the Kingdom of God. Indeed, it is through these proclamations that we come to understand Jesus' central paradigm and teaching on compassion being the true path to *Cooperating with God* and being holy (deification/imitatio dei).

## WHAT IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The Kingdom of God is an unfolding mystery.<sup>110</sup> It has been called by some as being the 'Reign of God' or the 'Active Lordship of God', and it is true, wherever you find the will of God being done, there you have also found the Kingdom of God. While that definition does an adequate job of defining the invisible activity of the Kingdom, it fails to provide a bright image of the visible face of the Kingdom. I like to define the Kingdom of God as being the communal relationship between God and all of His creatures. The Kingdom of God is that place/active-state where those who are in growing symphonic relationship with God (and all of His creatures) dwell.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Cf. Mt. 13:11.

<sup>111</sup> The Gospel of *Matthew* uses the phrase 'Kingdom of Heaven' forty-two times compared with only five instances of 'Kingdom of God'. We have learned from the writings St. Irenaeus, Tertullian, St. Clement of Alexandria, and Origen (the two latter via the historical writings of Eusebius) that this gospel was first of all the Gospels, and that it was first written to the Hebrew Israelites in their own language. That being the case, it makes sense that the author(s) would have used the phrase 'the Kingdom of Heaven', rather than 'the Kingdom of YHWH'.

## ON THE AGE & PURPOSE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Being that there was never a time when God has not reigned and there being never a time when He did not desire to be in symphonic relationship with His creatures, even when they were but a thought in His heart, we can say with all certainty that there was never a time when the Kingdom of God did not exist.

The purpose of the Kingdom is for God to share Himself, to share His Holy love with all of His creatures and for all of His creatures to share themselves with Him. The Kingdom of God is the perfect form of communion and thanksgiving. As we see expressed in Genesis 3:14-19, as a result of humanities' 'Original Sin', the symphonic community and mutual self giving between the Creator and His creation was broken and the conditions/governance of the Kingdom were temporarily modified.

To further illustrate the disrepair that humanities' 'Original Sin' caused in Kingdom life, we could point to two other great shifts that occurred. First, the King Himself could no longer dwell in the same space with His creatures as He had done in the past. The Holy and the wounded had to be separated for a short time for the sake of the wounded. In other words, the wounded had to be kicked out of the Kingdom until they were healed. During this season, the King would speak to His creatures primarily through messengers, visions, dreams, creation itself, and etcetera, until the fullness of time had arrived when He would again open the doors to the Kingdom and allow them to enter freely. Second, whereas before if Adam and Eve would have conceived and brought forth children prior to 'the Fall', those children would have been born as full fledged citizens of the Kingdom, today, no children born in a wounded state are born as citizens of the Kingdom. Even the circumcision given to the Israelites only allowed them to rest in the mere shadow of the parapets of the Kingdom's wall. As Christ Jesus said to Nicodemus, no one can even *see* the Kingdom of God without being born from above, and to *enter* the Kingdom one has to be born of water and Spirit.<sup>112</sup> It is through the Sacrament of Baptism (being cleansed of humanities' 'Original Sin' and receiving the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) through which we are born again as full citizens of the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. Jn. 3:1-5.



The mission of reconciliation in the Kingdom of God has never changed. It has always been God's desire for all of His creatures to fully partake in His Divine Nature. In the language of the *Circle of Grace* and *Circle of Hate*, we could say that the Kingdom of God encompasses the full width and depth of the *Circle of Grace* perfectly. The love of God that unites and perfects all things that it predestines, proceeds outward from the point at the center of the *Circle of Grace* to its outer ring where it bounces off and returns back to the center, touching everything that believes in it. It is through the perpetual energy of this boomerang of love that God gives out to His creatures and they, in turn, reciprocate with equal liberality. Through this love, we are conformed to the image of Christ (the center). As citizenship in the Kingdom expands, more love is being pressed against the ring of the *Circle of Grace*, causing it to expand. Because of this expansion of love, the Kingdom of God is actively in the process of destroying the Kingdom of Satan, and the *Circle of Grace* is actively in the process of overcoming the *Circle of Hate*.

## ON THE MISSION STATEMENT & THEOLOGY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The mission of the Kingdom of God, to bring about perfect communion between God and man, through the perpetual Ministry of Reconciliation, is best expressed in the Old Testament as a mission statement in the words of His promissory Covenants:

*"I will render you exceedingly fertile; I will make nations of you, kings shall stem from you. I will maintain my covenant with you and your descendants after you through the ages as an everlasting pact, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you."*<sup>113</sup>

*"Now then, speak thus to my servant David, 'The Lord of host has this to say: It was I who took you from the pasture and from the care of the flock to be commander of my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you went, and I have destroyed all your enemies before you. And I will make you famous like the great ones of the earth. I will fix a place for my people Israel; I will plant them so that they may dwell in their place without further disturbance. Neither shall the wicked continue to afflict them as they did of old, since the time I first appointed judges over my people Israel. I will give you rest from all your enemies. The Lord also reveals to you that He will*

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<sup>113</sup> Gen. 17:6-8.

*establish a house for you. And when your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your heir after you, sprung from your loins, and I will make his kingdom firm. It is he who shall build a house for my name. And I will make his royal throne firm forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. And if he does wrong, I will correct him with the rod of men and with human chastisements; but I will not withdraw my favor from him as I withdrew it from your predecessor Saul, whom I removed from my presence. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall stand firm forever.”<sup>114</sup>*

All of the Gospels agree that Jesus’ entire body of work (teachings, deeds of healing, and conduct), both before and after His resurrection, have as their singular foundation and energy the Messianic mission to usher in the age of the Kingdom of God. Jesus’ theology can be called ‘Kingdom theology’ and its doctrines teach that the path to holiness is not through the ritual purity and exclusive separation from sinners that the Pharisees were set in teaching. On the contrary, according to Kingdom theology, we are saved by helping to save others, we are made holy by helping others along the path to holiness, and we find true life not by preserving our own life, but rather by given it away in love. Kingdom theology does not teach us to merely have sympathy for those in need, rather, it teaches us to have empathy for them. At the center of all Kingdom theology is the uncompromising practice of compassion - only through pure motives and means.

## CONCERNING THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Inasmuch as God loves us wherever we are, He loves us far too much to leave us how we are. It was for this reason that the doors to the Kingdom were shut after ‘the Fall’ and the reason why they were open again after the resurrection.

Each of the four Gospels clearly state that it was at the beginning of His ministry, immediately following His Baptism and Temptation in the desert, that Jesus made a clear and emphatic statement concerning the coming of the Kingdom of God and its mission. Each of the Gospels then go on to condense the activities of a three year ministry of Christ Jesus in which He gave His disciples precise teachings and examples on

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<sup>114</sup> 2 Sam. 7:8-16.

how they were to fulfill the mission of the Kingdom after He had ascended to the right hand of the Father.

Mark is the shortest of the four Gospels in its version of Jesus' statement concerning the coming of the Kingdom and its mission. "After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the good message of God: 'This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand, *metanoëo* and believe in the good message.'"<sup>115</sup> The Marcan account does not take the time to tell us exactly what Old Testament prophecy is being fulfilled here, other than its references to Isaiah's promise of Salvation at the very beginning of its narrative.<sup>116</sup> And perhaps that is enough for Mark just to point to Isaiah's prophecy and say that the old has passed away and the new is here. On the contrary, Mark's emphasis on the Kingdom's mission seems to be on the timing of its coming and the need for people to recognize it. This is why they are being called to *metanoëo*<sup>117</sup> what they thought that the Kingdom would be and, rather, to have faith in what it actually is.

The Gospel of Matthew leads with the same chronology of Mark in telling us that Jesus began proclaiming "Shuwb, for the Kingdom of God is at hand," after His Desert Temptation and John's (the Waymaker) arrest. Matthew also draws from Isaiah to make a prophetic point about the mission of the Kingdom of God,<sup>118</sup> but the similarities between these two Gospels end there. The Matthean account is not concerned about when the Kingdom's coming was first preached, but rather on where it was first preached: "When He heard that John had been arrested, He withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and went to live in Capernaum by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, that what had been said through the prophet might be fulfilled: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death light has arisen."<sup>119</sup> The last portion of Isaiah's prophecy, concerning the mission statement of the Kingdom of God, reminds us of what we will encounter

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<sup>115</sup> Mt. 1:14-15.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Isa. 40; Mk. 1:2-3.

<sup>117</sup> Greek for 'think differently', 'change course', or 'reconsider'. The Hebrew equivalent used by Jesus was probably shuwb.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Isa. 8:23.

<sup>119</sup> Mt. 4:12-17.

below in the Gospel of John that the Kingdom is the great light that came into the world to dispel the darkness.

Luke agrees that Jesus began His ministry after the Temptation in the Desert and also that it began in Capernaum, but the similarities with the other Gospels end there. For Luke, the fascinating aspect of the story does not take place in Capernaum, but rather twenty miles southwest, as the crow flies, in Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. And the Lucan narrative is not concerned about when or where the Kingdom's coming was first preached as the other Gospels were, but rather on who proclaimed its coming: "He came to Nazareth, where He had grown up, and went according to His custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has appointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." Rolling up the scroll, He handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at Him. He said to them, "Today this Scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke highly of Him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from His mouth. They also asked, "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" He said to them, "Surely you will quote me this proverb, 'Physician, cure yourself,' and say, 'Do here in your native place the things that we heard were done in Capernaum.'" And He said, "Amen, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own native place."<sup>120</sup>

Imagine Jesus reading Isaiah's prophecy in the synagogue of the same town where He grew up; where He played and had childhood friends just like any other kid, and in front of some of the same people who He may have performed some carpentry work for. Now imagine Him emphasizing the word 'me' as He read the prophecy and perhaps, pointing to Himself all three times. Being a people who were oppressed, marginalized, and heavily taxed by a foreign government, the local townsfolk were very happy to hear these good tidings from Jesus about a new year of Jubilee, but they were also having a very difficult time believing that little Yeshua, son of Yoseph, grew up to be their long-awaited Messiah.

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<sup>120</sup> Lk. 4:16-24.

Yet, the story in Luke is not all about rejection. The Kingdom's light will always be rejected by the darkness. On the contrary, as great of a mission statement that Jesus proclaimed at Nazareth, it would have been enough just to read the last seven words that He had come to "*proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.*" Again, these were the words that His hometown audience called 'gracious'. With these words, Jesus had announced a year of Jubilee, which, like a Sabbatical (Sabbath) year (every 49<sup>th</sup> year), was a sacred year of rest and restoration for the people and the land. During the Jubilee year all and was restored to its original inherited line of ownership, liberty for all of creation was decreed, slaves/prisoners were freed, and sowing, reaping, and harvesting were prohibited.<sup>121</sup> This is the type of year that is acceptable to the Lord.

The year of Jubilee was always announced on the Day of Atonement (on the tenth day of the seventh month) by blasting a ram's horn throughout the land. That this was the Kingdom's announcement of a new Day of Atonement is evident through Jesus' (the source of true Atonement) call for all to *shuwb*. This self-evident truth is further supported by the fact that the trumpet blast came not from a ram's horn, but by the true sacrificial ram Himself, Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Abraham was given a ram to spare his own son from being sacrificed, and God's compassion permitted for animal blood to atone for our sins; thereby allowing the penitent to remain in the shadow of His Kingdom. Yet, it was not enough for God that we rest in His shadow. What He desired was for us to be fully reconciled to Him and Him to us, but animal blood was not equipped to accomplish that awesome task. The only way that man would finally be able to enter the Kingdom of God was through the Blood of His own Son shed on the Cross of Calvary, and, for our sake, it was done!

This ultimate expression of God's love for us is at the heart of Luke's emphasis on who brought the Kingdom of God. As the due result of God becoming man, in order to gather and reconcile man into the Kingdom of God, man's relationship with 'other' was forever redefined. That is, by virtue of the Creator becoming one of His creatures, no longer could the creatures rightfully think of themselves as being more or less than equal to their fellow creatures. If we had previously defined our relationship with others through the paradigm of master vs. servant,

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. Lev. 25.

owner vs. possession, or subjector vs. subject, those constructs were forever broken at the advent of the doors of the Kingdom being open, as the direct result of God becoming man and sacrificing His earthly life, so that His creature's might obtain eternal life.

Outside of Jesus' dialogue with Pontius Pilate, the only direct reference that the Johannine account makes concerning the Kingdom of God is in regards to how one comes by the way of seeing and entering it. Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus will be addressed at others times throughout this series, but for now I will skip ahead a few verses in chapter three and continue my focus on Jesus' statements concerning the coming of the Kingdom.

Being that John's chronology is theological, rather than historical, the timing of Jesus' dialogue is also of no concern to us here. All of the Synoptic Gospels drew from Isaiah in their own unique way to colorfully describe the mission of the Kingdom, its time of proclamation, its place of first proclamation, and its chief proclaimer. In vv. 16 thru 21 the Gospel of John poetically and perfectly summates all of the Synoptics in saying that when God sent His Son it was truly the time (when) of fulfillment (Mark), that the great light beyond Galilee (where) is Jesus who came into the world (Mathew), and that He (who) will always be rejected in this world by those who cannot see Him for who He is (Luke). John then goes on to answer what he believes to be the most important question, and uses an entire book to do so. The great question for John is, 'Why did Jesus bring us the Kingdom of God?'

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, we find in each of the four Gospel accounts, that Jesus gave a brief statement concerning the Kingdom's coming and its mission. He and His disciples were sure to have proclaimed these good tidings everywhere they went during the Lord's three year ministry. God's compassion knows no depth! Not only did He allow His Kingdom to come to us, but He announced its coming through His beloved and only begotten Son who had come to us in the flesh. God's love for us does not stop there. His Kingdom has not only come, but its doors are open to anyone who changes his/her life course and believes. Moreover, the doors of the Kingdom are not open because of anything that we have done. On the contrary, they are open in spite of who we are. Without God's love, compassion, grace, and the Blood of His Son, the doors would still be shut.

## ON THE MEANS OF DRAWING

There are two means through which God draws His creatures through the doors of His Kingdom, that is: by (1) Natural Invitation and by (2) Evangelization. Concerning the former, by virtue of the source of their creation, every creature of God is naturally drawn and is being drawn back to the origin of their source of life. The tide of Divine Love that ebbs and flows and constantly presses our frail and wounded bodies back to the sandy beaches of the Kingdom is almost irresistible. Who can swim against the tsunami of God's love for his/her entire earthly life, except for the demonically proud, stubborn, and independent? Who, other than they, would rather suffer the false illusion of joy in the Kingdom of Satan than carry his/her Cross to Calvary?

I like to describe Natural Invitation as being like a game of tug-a-war. In this game, two individuals or two teams of individuals position themselves on the opposite side of a long rope, at least four feet between each other. A flag that hangs off the rope at the center of the distance between them determines the victory according to which individual or team has successfully employed strength, timing, and technique to force the flag from the center position to their side. From the moment that we are born, all of us are being pulled into the Kingdom of God by His love and grace. Many of us, according to our Israelite nature, dig in and resist the pull of God. Life in the Kingdom of God does not begin until we give in and let God win by letting go of the rope and watch Him laugh deliriously as He falls down on His butt. In turn, we cannot help but to join Him in laughter, given that we are as pleased as Him that He finally won, thanks to our cooperation in His victory.

Thanks to the gift of free-choice that God has given every human being, we can all repent and pray according to the knowledge that we have of God and of the condition of our soul. It is natural for us to desire to be reconciled to God; to return home like the lost son and tell our Father 'I am sorry', and to desire a true relationship with Him.<sup>122</sup> None of which was possible until Jesus Christ permanently atoned for our sins through His own Blood on the Cross. It is because of His death on the Cross that we can now respond to our Natural Invitation to seek

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. Lk. 15:11-32.

the Kingdom of God with the assurance that we will find it if we seek it above all things.<sup>123</sup>

As a result of God's love demanding that all of creation be reconciled back to Him, Natural Invitation draws humans into the Kingdom, but stops there. Natural Invitation is simply that, an invitation. An invitation to what, you ask? It is an invitation from God to make us holy. That is, Natural Invitation brings the creature not to God alone, but rather into the Kingdom of God where the Church has been given by Him to be the full means of our Salvation (being healed/made whole/perfected) on earth. For example, it was not enough for Jesus that Saul finally acknowledged His Kingship, only after he was struck blind and heard the voice. Indeed, it was a good start that Saul had accepted his invitation to the wedding feast, but his journey did not truly begin until he was received into the Church of the Kingdom of God through the Sacrament of Baptism.<sup>124</sup>

Concerning the second means of God drawing His creatures into life with Him, the Church in the Kingdom of God does not have a mission, it has a duty. Her duty is to serve the Kingdom of God by cooperating with its mission to reconcile all of creation to its Creator. In this regard, the Church has rightly been called a Sacrament, which is both an effacious sign and a means of divine grace, instituted by Christ Jesus. In other words, the Church, created specifically for the Kingdom of God, is always at the service of the Kingdom of God.

To fulfill the mission of the Kingdom that it serves, the Church was given three duties: (1) To proclaim the word of God - "*As you go, make this proclamation, 'The Kingdom of God is at hand.'*"<sup>125</sup> "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, . . . teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*"<sup>126</sup> "*He said to them, 'Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature;'*"<sup>127</sup> (2) To celebrate the Sacraments - "*. . . Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*"<sup>128</sup> "*Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained;*"<sup>129</sup> and (3)

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Mt. 6:33.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Acts 9:1-19.

<sup>125</sup> Mt. 10:7.

<sup>126</sup> Mt. 28:19-20.

<sup>127</sup> Mk. 16:35.

<sup>128</sup> Mt. 28:19.

<sup>129</sup> Jn. 20:23.



To perform works of Charity - "Whatever you did for these least of mine, you did for me."<sup>130</sup> "Whatever town you enter and they welcome you eat what is before you, cure the sick and say to them, 'The Kingdom of God is at hand for you.'<sup>131</sup> It is only through the exercise of these duties that the Church maintains Her missionary character, by directly engaging in the mission of the Kingdom of God. In fact, it is only through the chaste dispatch of Her duties that walls of the *Circle of Grace* expands to move closer to overcoming the *Circle of Hate*. In contrast, the less pure the Church is in proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the Sacraments, and performing works of Charity, the smaller and less effacious that the Church, the Kingdom and the *Circle of Grace* will be. The Kingdom of God needs the Church to love through and the Church needs the Kingdom to love in, just as Christ Jesus needs our bodies to love through and we need the Body of Christ to love in.

Despite the fact that the Son of God was born of woman, choose His own Apostles, spent three years training them, set them apart, ordained them, and gave them such awesome responsibilities, some still deny the fact that Jesus intended to start a Church. Basically they posit that, while Jesus/God walked in the flesh, He had no clue of what He was doing or the outcome of any His actions. Yet, does sacred Scripture not say that, "And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man."<sup>132</sup> For arguments sake, let us pretend for a moment that Jesus did not grow in understanding of the immediate and long-term outcome of the mission that was given to Him by His Eternal Father and that Matthew 16:18 is just the Church's reflective imagination. To still hold that Jesus did not know what He was doing even *after* He was crucified, resurrected, and returned to give His disciples another forty days worth of instruction, is ludicrous! When Jesus personally spoke to Saul and asked him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"<sup>133</sup> did He still not know what the outcome of Saul's conversion would be on the Church? Of course Christ Jesus intended to start a Church, otherwise He is not God. In fact, to argue any position to the contrary is to suggest that God is not God, and that is simply unChristian!

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<sup>130</sup> Mt. 25:36 . . . 40.

<sup>131</sup> Lk. 10:8-9.

<sup>132</sup> Lk. 2:52.

<sup>133</sup> Acts 9:4.

Concerning the particular nature of the Church in the Kingdom of God, without misfortune, it is a Divine axiom that the Catholic Church is the only Church fully within the Kingdom. These words are neither triumphant nor maliciously polemic. Rather, they are expressive of the fact that God has given only one Church to perform the three duties in regards to the mission of His Kingdom. “*And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.*”<sup>134</sup> That is, of all the churches and communities that do contribute to the first duty of Proclaiming the word of God, there is only one Church, the Catholic Church, that has been doing so from the very beginning; there is only one Church, the Catholic Church, that has received, preserved, and proclaimed the word as received directly from the Apostles themselves; there is only one Church, the Catholic Church, that proclaims the teachings of Jesus Christ in their fullness without error; and there is only one Church, the Catholic Church, that proclaims the authentic word that She was given to the whole world in unity, and that is why the true Apostolic Church is called the one Pillar and Foundation of Truth.<sup>135</sup>

Concerning the second duty, God established His Church to be a Sacrament to celebrate seven particular Sacraments (Baptism,<sup>136</sup> Confirmation,<sup>137</sup> Eucharist,<sup>138</sup> Penance<sup>139</sup> and Reconciliation,<sup>140</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Mk. 3:25.

<sup>135</sup> 1 Tim. 3:15.

<sup>136</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the Sacrament of Baptism as the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other Sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in Her mission. (Cf. CCC 977, 1213 ff.; 1275; 1278.

<sup>137</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the Sacrament of Confirmation the Sacrament that completes the grace of Baptism by a special outpouring of gifts of the Holy Spirit, which seal or “confirm” the baptized person in union with Christ and equip them for active participation in the worship and apostolic life of the Church. (Cf. CCC. 1285)

<sup>138</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the Sacrament of Eucharist as the source and summit of the Christian life. The other Sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and all oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ Himself, our Passover. For, in all the other Sacraments of the Church we receive great grace from God,

Matrimony,<sup>141</sup> Holy Orders,<sup>142</sup> and Anointing of the Sick<sup>143</sup>) which would serve as the means to perfectly reconcile humankind to Himself.

The Kingdom of God is full of grace that is readily available for the citizens of the Kingdom to cooperate with. The grace found in the Kingdom has the power to transform a wounded and sinful thing into a healed and holy thing. With the natural law written on his heart and the divine commands, from the very beginning, God gave man some of the help that he needed to be holy as He is Holy.<sup>144</sup> It is a fact that, by being conscious of God's natural law and observing God's commandments, man is truly able to avoid all sin, otherwise Jesus would not have told people who had not received the Sacrament of Baptism or the Holy Spirit to "Go and sin no more."<sup>145</sup>

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but in the Holy Eucharist we receive Christ Himself. It truly is the Sacrament of all Sacraments. (Cf. CCC 1322 ff.)

<sup>139</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the Sacrament of Penance as the liturgical celebration of God's forgiveness of the sins of the penitent, who is thus reconciled with God and with the Church. (Cf. CCC 980, 1422, 1440, 1448)

<sup>140</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the Sacrament of Reconciliation as the sacramental celebration in which, through God's mercy and forgiveness, the sinner is reconciled with God and also with the Church, Christ's Body, which is wounded by sin. (Cf. CCC 1601)

<sup>141</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the Sacrament of Matrimony as a covenant or partnership of life between a man and woman, which is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children (Cf. CCC 1601).

<sup>142</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the Sacrament of Holy Orders the Sacrament of Apostolic Ministry by which the mission entrusted by Christ to His Apostles continues to be exercised in the Church through the laying on of hands. This Sacrament confers a permanent, sacramental character on the recipient (Cf. CCC 1536).

<sup>143</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick as the "Sacrament of the dying," administered by a priest to a baptized person who begins to be in danger of death because of illness or old age, through prayer and the anointing of the body with the oil of the sick. The proper effects of the Sacrament include a special grace of healing and comfort to the Christian who is suffering the infirmities of serious illness or old age, and the forgiving of the person's sins (Cf. CCC 1499, 1520, 1523, 1526-1532).

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Lev. 11:45, 20:7; Mt. 5:48; 1 Jn. 3:3.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Jn. 5:14, 8:11.

Avoiding sin is a great good, but even an atheist can do that. Moreover, it is not enough to heal our wound from ‘the Fall’ without reconciling us to Him. Neither is it enough to just reconcile us to God without providing the means for us to remain reconciled. For that act of mercy we needed the Son of God to shed His Blood on the Cross of Calvary. It is through the Blood of Christ that the wounded nature of the citizens of the Kingdom is transformed, transubstantiated, and configured into the Body of Christ. The primary means for the distribution of this transformative grace are the Sacraments of the Catholic Church.

Two of the seven Sacraments, Baptism and Matrimony, are uniquely creative Sacraments; meaning that, when they are lawfully and rightfully received, God creates a new thing out of the recipient(s); that is, the Baptized person is a born again and becomes a new creation,<sup>146</sup> and the man and woman together become one new creation through Matrimony.<sup>147</sup> These efficacious acts of creation belong solely to God, not to the Church and that is why these two Sacraments can be rightfully received inside or outside of the institutional Church. The other five Sacraments are only rightfully celebrated on Baptized persons by an ordained priest of the Catholic Church.

Of these seven Sacraments, one in particular, the Holy Eucharist, has been adorned by all of saints in the Catholic Church, as being the center of Christian living and the life of the Church. If this centering of the Holy Eucharist is true, and I fully believe that it is, then it follows that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is the second door through which we receive the Sacraments of the Church (Baptizing being the first door). For, without being reconciled to God through the Church, no other Sacrament is rightly received, most especially the Holy Eucharist, which communicates healing for those who receive it worthily, but condemnation for those who unworthily receive it.

The seven Sacraments of the Church, through which God freely, compassionately, and graciously shares Himself with humankind, stands in bright contrast to the seven capital sins (pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and sloth) that Satan shares with his citizens. While the

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<sup>146</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Mt. 19:6.

former gifts work in us to draw us nearer to God, the latter works in us to separate us from God.

Concerning the third duty, there are many organizations and churches that perform works of charity, but there is only one Church, the Catholic Church, that performs them in every country of the world; there is only one Church, the Catholic Church, that extends Her works of love for the dead and souls in Purgatory; and there is only one Church, the Catholic Church, that invites, incorporates, and joins in with the saints and angels in Heaven to perform Her works of charity.

## DEFINITIVE STATEMENTS ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF GOD, ACCORDING TO SACRED SCRIPTURE

Like God, sacred Scripture uses familiar Middle Eastern language, metaphors, and parables to tell us a lot about what the Kingdom of God is like and not like. By simply examining the Kingdom, as narrated in Samuel (I and II) and Kings (I and II), and the sayings of Jesus, concerning the Kingdom in the Gospels, we can paint a very colorful picture of the Kingdom of God. There are three aspects under which I will proceed to paint this picture, those being: (1) Citizenship in the Kingdom; (2) Life in the Kingdom; and (3) Other Aspects of the Kingdom:

### *Citizenship in the Kingdom*

1. Ever since people have heard about the doors of the Kingdom being open they have been giving up everything to enter it.<sup>148</sup>
2. Those who know what they have found in finding the Kingdom believe that it is the most important thing in their life.<sup>149</sup>
3. The way to enter the Kingdom is by seeking it first, above all other things.<sup>150</sup>
4. The door into the Kingdom is narrow and no one is entitled to citizenship therein.<sup>151</sup>
5. The door to the Kingdom is shut to those who reject the Son of God.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Cf. Mt. 11:12.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Mt. 13:44-45.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Mt. 6:33; Lk. 12:31-32.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. Lk. 13:22-30.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Mt. 21:33-46.

6. No one can even see the Kingdom of God without being born from above.<sup>153</sup>
7. No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.<sup>154</sup>
8. The Kingdom of God is not for those who have an attachment to their former way of life.<sup>155</sup>
9. The Kingdom belongs to those who are poor in spirit and to those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness.<sup>156</sup>
10. Citizenship into the Kingdom comes by the way of voluntary repentance and Baptism.<sup>157</sup>
11. The Kingdom is full of the penitent and the perishing.<sup>158</sup>
12. The Kingdom of God is for those who resist sin.<sup>159</sup>
13. Repentant sinners are entering the Kingdom of God ahead of those who only have the appearance of righteousness.<sup>160</sup>
14. The Kingdom belongs to the childlike.<sup>161</sup>
15. Those who take the time to prepare themselves for admission into the Kingdom will be able to enter it.<sup>162</sup>
16. There will be some who will try to obstruct others from entering the Kingdom by showing them a false path to holiness.<sup>163</sup>
17. It is not only difficult for the wealthy to enter the Kingdom of God, but for anyone who has many attachments in the world. Moreover, entering the Kingdom of God takes patience, sacrifice, and help from God.<sup>164</sup>
18. There are some apparent citizens of the Kingdom who will be thrown into Hell at the end of the age.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Cf. Jn. 3:3.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Jn. 3:5.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. Lk. 9:62.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Mt. 5:3;10; Lk. 6:20.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Mt. 3:2,13:47.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Mt. 13:24-30.

<sup>159</sup> Cf. Mk. 9:42-48; Mk. 9:47.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Mt. 21:28-32.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. Mt. 19:14; Mk. 10:14-15.

<sup>162</sup> Cf. Mt. 25:1-13.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Mt. 23:13.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Mt. 19:24-26; Mk. 10:17-31; Lk. 18:24-30.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Mt. 13:39-41.

19. Those who understand the command to love are not far from the Kingdom of God.<sup>166</sup>

### *Life in the Kingdom*

1. The King of the Kingdom comes from humble beginnings;<sup>167</sup> He is highly honored and respected;<sup>168</sup> He is anointed;<sup>169</sup> the Spirit of God is upon Him;<sup>170</sup> He was patient to assume His Kingship;<sup>171</sup> He builds and assists the institutional religion by gathering God's people and bring them into communion with Him;<sup>172</sup> the King is married (Christ married to the Church); the King has a Father; the King rules for the sake of God's people.<sup>173</sup>
2. The King of the Kingdom has certain rights.<sup>174</sup>
3. The prophet Samuel anointed Saul as King, but God anointed His Son as King.<sup>175</sup>
4. The King maintains His reign through obedience to God.<sup>176</sup>
5. The poor and suffering follow the King.<sup>177</sup>
6. We participate in the Kingdom's victory over evil, and the people of the Kingdom trust the King to act in their best interests.<sup>178</sup>
7. The citizens of the Kingdom sing songs of praise about the King.<sup>179</sup>
8. Citizens of the Kingdom are expected to freely make the most of what they have been freely given.<sup>180</sup>
9. The mother of the King is the Queen of the Kingdom. She intercedes for citizens of the Kingdom and sits on a throne.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Cf. Mk. 12:28-34.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 9:21.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 9:24.

<sup>169</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 10:1.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 10:10.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 10:16.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. 2 Sam. 7.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. 2 Sam. 5:12.

<sup>174</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 8.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 12.

<sup>176</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 13:10-14.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 22:2.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 14.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 18:7.

<sup>180</sup> Cf. Lk. 19:11-27.

10. The greatest in the Kingdom is humble like a child and is a servant to all.<sup>182</sup>
11. The least in the Kingdom are those who break the commandments and teaches others to do likewise, but the greatest in the Kingdom are those who obey the commandments and teach others to do so.<sup>183</sup>
12. The least in the Kingdom is greater than John the Baptist, who Christ Jesus called the greatest man born of woman.<sup>184</sup>
13. The righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom.<sup>185</sup>
14. There are some who will renounce marriage, so that they can devote their lives to the service of the Kingdom.<sup>186</sup>
15. There is no favoritism for citizens of the Kingdom. All are given the same reward for service.<sup>187</sup>

### *Other Aspects of the Kingdom*

1. The Kingdom belongs to God the Father.<sup>188</sup>
2. The Kingdom of God is not a thing to be observed. The Kingdom of God is wherever the will of God is being done.<sup>189</sup>
3. Christ Jesus feast with us in the Kingdom.<sup>190</sup>
4. The Kingdom is Catholic (one, whole, homogenous). It is not divided.<sup>191</sup>
5. The Kingdom of God is eternal.<sup>192</sup>
6. The Kingdom of God is not of this world.<sup>193</sup>
7. The Kingdom of God is at war. It is actively in the process of destroying the Kingdom of Satan.<sup>194</sup>

<sup>181</sup> Cf. 1 Kgs. 2:12, 19.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. Mt. 18:4.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Mt. 5:19-20.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. Mt. 11:11; Lk. 7:28.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Mt. 13:43.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. Mt. 19:12.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 30; Mt. 20:1-16.

<sup>188</sup> Cf. Mt. 26:29.

<sup>189</sup> Cf. Lk. 17:20-21.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Mt. 26:29.

<sup>191</sup> Cf. 2 Sam.; Mt. 12:25; Mk. 3:24; Lk. 11:17-20.

<sup>192</sup> Cf. Mt. 25:34; Lk. 1:30-33.

<sup>193</sup> Cf. Jn. 18:36.

<sup>194</sup> Cf. Mk. 13:8; Lk. 21:10.



8. The Kingdom is expansive. Over time, it continually and substantially grows in size.<sup>195</sup>
9. The Kingdom of God is the fulfillment of the Davidic Kingdom.<sup>196</sup>
10. The Church, which has been given the Peterine Ministry, is the entrance door to the Kingdom of God.<sup>197</sup>
11. The Church has been sent to gather and invite many people into the Kingdom.<sup>198</sup>
12. The Gospel (good news) belongs to the Kingdom of God.<sup>199</sup>
13. Knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom were first given to the Apostles.<sup>200</sup>
14. The Old Covenant Kingdom was requested by the Jews, so that they might be like their neighbors, but God established His Kingdom, so that we might be like Him.<sup>201</sup>
15. The Kingdom is where the Ark of the Covenant is. The Ark of the Old Covenant contained the Decalogue (which is the Law/Word of God), a Pot of Manna (which was the bread that sustained the life of the Hebrews during the Exodus), and Aaron's Rod (which budded and convicted those who were grumbling against Moses). The Ark of the New Covenant is the Virgin Mary. It is she who contained Jesus Christ, who is the Word of God, the Bread of Life, and is intimately linked with the Holy Spirit (who convicts us).<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Cf. Mt. 13:31; Mk. 4:26-34.

<sup>196</sup> Cf. Mt. 13:52; Mk. 11:10.

<sup>197</sup> Cf. Mt. 16:19.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. Mt. 22:1-14; Lk. 14:15-24.

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Mt. 4:23.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. Mt. 13:11.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 8:20.

<sup>202</sup> The New Covenant Ark of Covenant (Mary) was prefigured in the Old Testament in a number of ways: (1) The Holy Spirit came upon both Arks in their Temples - 1 Kgs. 8:10-13 with Lk. 1:35; (2) Both Arks traveled to the hill country of Judah - 2 Sam. 6:2 w/ Lk. 1:39; (3) People demonstrated fear of the Lord that the Ark of the Covenant had come into their presence - 2 Sam. 6:9 w/ Lk. 1:43; There was dancing and leaping for joy in the presence of the Ark of Covenant at its arrival - 2 Sam. 6:14 w/ Lk. 1:44; There was singing and praise to God for the honor of possessing the Ark of the Covenant - 1 Chr. 16:8-36 w/ Lk. 1:46-55; Both Arks remained in a foreign territory for six months - 2 Sam.

16. There will be some who have a misunderstanding of what the Kingdom of God actually is.<sup>203</sup>
17. There were some who saw the Son of Man coming into his Kingdom.<sup>204</sup>
18. The proclamation about the coming of the Kingdom began with the coming of John the Waymaker.<sup>205</sup>
19. The Kingdom was first conferred on the Apostles, so that they might eat at the table of the Lord and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>206</sup>
20. The purpose of the Kingdom is to save God's people from the enemy who seeks to destroy them.<sup>207</sup>

## THE SEVEN MARKS OF THE CHURCH IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The Church (Ecclesia) of Christ, as properly defined by sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition, has Seven distinct and unique Marks, which I now briefly summarize:<sup>208</sup>

1. *There was never a time when the Church (the Body of Christ) did not exist.* To suggest otherwise is to believe that there was a time when the Son of God was not. The Church was *always* present in the heart of God and became visible to man at the moment of his (man's) creation. Another way to define the Church is by saying that the Church consists of those who are in complete union with God. "*I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.*"<sup>209</sup> God has always made a way for men and women to be

6:11 w/ Lk. 1:56; Both Arks were hidden and then revealed in a cave - 2 Macc. 2:5-8 w/ Lk. 2:7. See also Revelation 11:15-17,19 through 12:6 where Mary is presented as the Ark of the Covenant that appears as woman clothed with the sun.

<sup>203</sup> Cf. Mt. 20:20-28; Lk. 19:11.

<sup>204</sup> Cf. Mt. 16:28; Mk. 9:1.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. Lk. 16:16.

<sup>206</sup> Cf. Lk. 22:24-30.

<sup>207</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 9:16; 2 Sam. 9, 14.

<sup>208</sup> Historically, the Catholic Church has condensed these seven marks into four: (1) One; (2) Holy; (3) Catholic; and (4) Apostolic.

<sup>209</sup> Mt. 22:32.

in union with Him and has never left them to fend for themselves, but, rather, has ceaselessly offered help to lead them into true relationship with Himself. It is as St. Clement of Alexandria wrote in his *Stromateis* or *Miscellanies* in 202 C.E.:

"From what has been said, then, it seems clear to me that the True Church, that which is really ancient, is one; and in it are enrolled those who, in accord with a design, are just. . . .<sup>210</sup> We say, therefore, that in substance, in concept, in origin and in eminence the ancient and Catholic Church is alone, gathering as it does into the unity of the one faith which results from the familiar covenants, - or rather, from the one covenant in different times, by the will of the one God and through the one Lord, - those already chosen, those predestined by God who knew before the foundation of the world that they would be just."

2. *The Church came to exist in a unique way amongst those who were related to Abraham through blood and his household.*<sup>211</sup>

This cooperative Covenant that God established was not with the singular individual Abraham, but rather with the entire community ("To your descendants . . .");<sup>212</sup> that is, the ecclesia, the Church. Male circumcision was the external sign of this cooperative Covenant. God's Covenants are always with the whole community, whom He gathers together in one body, and this is why He called for the whole household (including infants) to be circumcised. We also see the broader implications to this First promissory Covenant when YHWH promises that He will perpetuate the Davidic Kingdom forever.<sup>213</sup> The Fathers of Vatican II, expressed the validity of this mark in the following manner:

"God did not create man for life in isolation, but for the formation of social unity. So also "it has pleased God to make men holy and save them not merely as individuals, without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which

<sup>210</sup> Here ( . . . ), Clement attributes the book of *Hebrews* to St. Paul.

<sup>211</sup> Dt. 9:10, 18:16, 23:1ff, 2 Esdr. 13:1; Num. 20:4.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. Gen. 15:12-21.

<sup>213</sup> Cf. 2 Sam. 7:13-17.

acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness.” So from the beginning of Salvation history He has chosen men not just as individuals but as members of a certain community. Revealing His mind to them, God called these chosen ones “His People” (Ex. 3:7-12), and, furthermore, made a covenant with them on Sinai (Cf. Ex. 24:1-8).<sup>214</sup>

3. *The Church came to exist in a fulfilled way amongst those who are related to Abraham through faith in the New Covenant* established through the Blood of Christ, the (Davidic) King, who established the new and fulfilled priesthood in the Church.<sup>215</sup> We *Cooperative with God* in the New Covenant through the Sacrament of Baptism, which heals us through the Blood of Christ, configures us to the Body of Christ (through the Holy Spirit), and gathers us into the household of God. The Fathers of Vatican II, expressed the benefit of this mark in the following manner:

“All men are called to belong to the new People of God. Wherefore this people, while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages, so that the decree of God’s will may be fulfilled. In the beginning, God made human nature one and decreed that all his children, scattered as they were, would finally be gathered together as one (Cf. Jn. 11:52). It was for this purpose that God sent his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things (cf. Heb. 1:2), that he might be teacher, king and priest of all, the head of the new and universal people of the sons of God. For this too God sent the Spirit of his Son as Lord and Life-giver. He it is who brings together the whole Church and each and every one of those who believe, and who is the well spring of their unity and the teaching of the Apostles and in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers (Cf. Acts 2:42).”<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Gaudium Et Spes 32, Pastoral’ Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Vatican II.

<sup>215</sup> Cf. Heb. 7:12.

<sup>216</sup> Lumen Gentium 13, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican II.

4. *The Church is one (like the Holy Trinity) and the Body of Christ Jesus.* The Church has always taught one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God, and Father of all.<sup>217</sup> Meaning, that within it there are no doctrinal factions or divisions (only *one* teaching). In consequence of the Church being one, She is also Holy, Whole, Universal (Catholic), and available to all people at all times.<sup>218</sup> She is the perpetual sign and instrument of divine solidarity. To be a member of the Church (the Body of Christ) is to be *like* the Church; for in the beginning we were made in Her image and likeness.<sup>219</sup> The Church is fully the Body of Christ in that it is the household of those who are *In Christ*; it is His means (physical body on earth of which He is the head) to fulfill the mission of the Kingdom of God and it where He reigns in His Real Presence as King and gives Himself away to those who believe through the Holy Eucharist.
  
5. *The Church is Apostolic,* meaning that it was established by the Twelve Apostles themselves as a visible organization and it has existed in perpetuity with their successors as Bishops, through Peterine succession, since the Pentecost of the Holy Spirit.<sup>220</sup> The Church is not only Apostolic in its roots, but Christ Jesus prayed that it would always remain to be Apostolic through *ordained* Apostolic Succession.<sup>221</sup> This grace was purposed, so

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<sup>217</sup> Cf. Eph. 4:5-6.

<sup>218</sup> Cf. Rev. 7:9-10.

<sup>219</sup> Cf. Gen. 1:26.

<sup>220</sup> The Church as defined by sacred Scripture - a general assembly (ecclesia) - (Dt. 9:10, 18:16); established by Jesus the Christ to last forever - (Mt. 16:18); is Catholic - (Rev. 7:9-10); for general/local areas - (Acts 5:11; 1 Cor. 1:2, 16:1); a physical building - (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 11:18, 14:19, 28 34-35); a universal community of believers - (1 Cor. 15:9; Gal. 1:13; Phil. 3:16); the mystical body of the Christ - (1 Cor. 12:1-31; Rom. 12:4-8); decisions of the Church are binding - (Mt. 18:47; Acts 15:28-29); the Church that Jesus established is necessary for Salvation - (Eph. 1:22-23); household of God and pillar and foundation of truth - (1 Tim. 3:15); CCC 830-835.

<sup>221</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines *Apostolic Succession* as: The handing on of apostolic preaching and authority from the Apostles to their successors the bishops through the laying on of hands, as a permanent office in the Church (Cf. CCC 77, 861).

that there would always be an authentic transmission of His doctoral teaching on earth. ***"I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."*** Writing between 189 and 199 C.E., St. Irenaeus wrote in his *Against Heresies*:

"But since it would be long to enumerate in such a volume as this the succession of all the churches, we confound all those who, in whatever manner, whether, through self-satisfaction or vainglory, or through blindness and wicked opinion, assembled other than where it is proper, by pointing out here the successions of the bishops of the greatest and most ancient Church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul, that Church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the Apostles. With that Church, because of its superior origin, all the Churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in the whole world, and it is in Her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the Apostolic tradition."

6. *The Church is without error in regards to its doctoral teachings on faith and morals*, because She only teaches what the Holy Spirit has deposited in Her since the age of the Apostles. The True Church will never be compromised by the lie of popular culture or waiver on any part of the Gospel of Christ Jesus. This truth is not only evident in sacred Scripture, but also in sacred Tradition, which is the perpetual life, teachings, and history of the Church.
7. *The Church is at the perpetual service of the Kingdom of God*. The sole purpose of the existence of the Church is to fulfill the mission of the Kingdom of God on earth, which is to gather all of God's creatures and reconcile them to Himself. The Church accomplishes this awesome task through the performance of Her three duties: (1) To proclaim the word of God; (2) To celebrate the Sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance and/or Reconciliation, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Anointing of the Sick); and (3) To perform works of Charity. The bright cord that binds and looses the many ministries and efforts of the

Church to accomplish the mission given to her is called 'the Peterine Ministry'. This ministry was established by Christ Jesus Himself and given to St. Peter and His successors to perform three duties, which are: (1) to be guided by the truth of God the Father, to obey the commands of God the Son, and to listen for and act upon the promptings of the Holy Spirit; (2) to be the servant, slave, and friend of all creatures of God; and (3) to be the rock of strength, unity, and support for the global Christian community. As the vessel of God's will on Earth, the Church is the undying communion of the living God with all the angels and saints in Heaven, souls in Purgatory, and on Earth who join in at every moment to know, love, and serve/trust the Holy Trinity.

These are the seven identifying marks of the Church that is fully within the *Circle of Grace*. The reason why the Catholic Church has fit each one of these marks during Her entire existence is simply because our Lord prayed that She would.<sup>222</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The Kingdom of God has come to provide all of us with all the means to be holy as our Father in Heaven is Holy.<sup>223</sup> It is the fulfillment of every command that God has ever made. The Kingdom of God is what the heart of every human desires from the moment that its Creator creates his or her soul and places it within the flesh, which occurs at the moment of conception. The Kingdom of God is a part of the great dowry that our Eternal Father has given us (the bride) to share with Christ (our bridegroom).

The Kingdom of God is divine love and citizens of the Kingdom live and participate in the divine nature of God. It is because of the King sharing His nature with His friends why we are not only able to avoid all sin, but, more importantly, avoid it through the proper motive of divine love. The unique character of citizens of the Kingdom of God is that they are all becoming more like their King. That is, they too desire to

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<sup>222</sup> Cf. Mt. 16:18.

<sup>223</sup> Cf. Lev. 11:45, 20:7; Mt. 5:48; 1 Jn. 3:3.

share all of themselves with others. They too desire to pour their love on all of God's creatures.

To desire anything above the Kingdom of God is to desire something other than life, truth, and liberty. If the sending of His only begotten and beloved Son is God's greatest act of love, then it follows that Jesus sending His Church, with the keys to the Kingdom, is God's greatest act of compassion. The seven Sacraments are the foundation of every means of Salvation that God has given the Church to offer humankind. The Catholic Church, herself a Sacrament, is the one celebrant of these ordinary means of Salvation. No one can be Saved outside of Christ Jesus, who is the head of the Catholic Church. There is no entrance into the Kingdom of God outside of Baptism, which is the door to all other Sacraments.

It is the duty of every Christian to *Cooperate with God* through the only Church that is fully cooperating with the mission of the Kingdom of God on earth.



## ~ Chapter Two ~

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# THE THREE DEGREES OF THE ASCENT TO PERFECTION

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**I**t can be said that all of these Thirteen Petitions speak to an individual's progress in their ascent to that point within the center of the *Circle of Grace*, which we also know as the process of justification that leads to perfection. In that regard, these Thirteen Petitions of the Bridegroom's Prayer are not only our duty, but also our lifestyle; meaning, our life in the Holy Spirit, which is true Christian spirituality.

In all of the old initiation rites, the initiate had to have first been compelled by some force or event (either voluntary or involuntary) before he could seek something greater than his own self could. In the instant case, before the soul can even be admitted to the Three Degrees of the Ascent to Perfection, it must first confess and repent of its sins. This first confession of repentance is what propels God's grace to move our soul from being in the *Circle of Hate* to being on the fringes of the *Circle of Grace*. Shortly before our confession of conversion, God would have either blessed our soul with knowledge of its miserable condition, or what the joys of a life *In Christ* could be like. Either-or is what compels the soul to shamefully cry out, as Simon Peter did, "*Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.*"<sup>1</sup> That is, before we can ascend to the heights of perfection, we must first descend to knowledge of the abyss of our nothingness, in the light of God.

Many souls are admitted into what I call the *Preparation Room* of the First Degree (which is the First Petition), but never advance past having just an elementary knowledge that Christ is the door to *Eternal Life*. For

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<sup>1</sup> Lk. 5:8.

them, the cost of advancing past the fringes seems too steep of a price to pay, especially when their senses of the flesh still crave for the joys and pleasures of the *Circle of Hate*. The fringes of the *Circle of Grace* are just a stone's throw away from what we loved so much back in the *Circle of Hate*, and so many souls will go back and forth all of their life, or as long as God's mercy will sustain their waffling.

I also like to think of these Three Degrees through the lenses of St. Peter's last confession, as recorded in the *Gospel of John*, in that each of them demands a new command to cooperate with the love of God. That is to say, that for admission to the First Degree (Petitions Two through Eight), Christ first asks the disciple, 'Do you love me', and the disciple confesses, 'Yes', and Christ charges that confession by demanding, 'Then know me'. More will be said about *Simon Peter's Confessions* in *Cooperating with God - The Life with the Cross*.

These first seven Petitions of the First Degree lead us to being persecuted by the same system of envy, self-lust, greed, pride, anger, gluttony, and laziness that persecuted the only begotten and beloved Son of God. The adopted child of God will successfully undergo their own passion on the way to being conformed into the image of Christ. Not having yet been commanded by Christ to go preach, the disciple is admonished in the First Degree to be silent in persecution - trusting that God will defend them. As St. Paul wrote, "*Our hope for you is firm, for we know that as you share in the suffering, you also share in the encouragement.*"<sup>2</sup> Those who do live up to their confession will go on to strengthen their love for the Triune God by the means of the suffering that comes with knowing Christ Jesus through those seven Petitions. That is, in the First Degree we learn how to *pick up* the same Cross that we will be asked to *carry* in the future. True discipleship always begins with taking little baby steps before we can actually stand up and walk.

The Holy Spirit will never stop trying to perfect the virtues that we learn in the First Degree - namely obedience, trust, joy in suffering, fortitude, and vulnerability, but the Ascent to the Second Degree begins again with that persistent question, 'Do you love me?'. If we say 'Yes', then Christ will give us the second charge, 'Then serve me'.

These two Petitions of the Second Degree (Petitions Nine and Ten) come with all sorts of humiliation and mockery. The enemies of Christ

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<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 1:7.

have never stopped trying to destroy the Catholic Church. The ironic history of the Church is that Jesus said that the gates of Hell will never prevail against it,<sup>3</sup> but these same gates *have never* and *will never* stop trying to do that very thing. Therefore, those who are sent out by the Church must suffer in joy, be crowned with thorns, scourged, spit upon, hated, and crucified.

The reason why I emphasize in these Petitions the fact that there is only one Church fully within the *Circle of Grace* is because true service, by its very nature in God, is catholic. True service does not scatter, but rather it gathers with Christ.<sup>4</sup> True service (love) does not subvert the will of God or divide His people into factions. Moreover, all of the virtues that the disciple learns in the First Degree always culminate into a true cooperation with the work of the Holy Spirit in the Catholic Church. That is, the same Spirit who had worked in you, though far off, will now lead you to His Temple for further instruction. Because the true Church of Jesus Christ is a Temple,<sup>5</sup> we should expect to find it endowed with all those things that all Temples are usually endowed with; such as, ordained priests, an altar, and a sacrifice.<sup>6</sup> This is just one way in which we know, for certain, that the Catholic Church is the New Covenant Temple of God.

Even those who had been Catholic for all of their lives, so to speak, due to nationality or family tradition, will now feel a renewed attachment and love for the Church as they mature in the Second Degree. Whereas before, they had their own opinions about the teachings of the Church, now through the Holy Spirit's work of conforming them to the image of Christ, their will would have become more closely aligned with the common will of the Holy Trinity who the Church always proclaims in Truth. The Holy Spirit empowers us to serve Christ *through* the Church, because out of the Church the disciple is sent to build up the Body of Christ. Whereas before, we could barely pick up the Cross, now the Holy Spirit helps us to pick it up and carry it in service to God's will. Indeed, there are great trials and sufferings in the Second Degree, but

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Mt. 16:18.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Mt. 12:30.

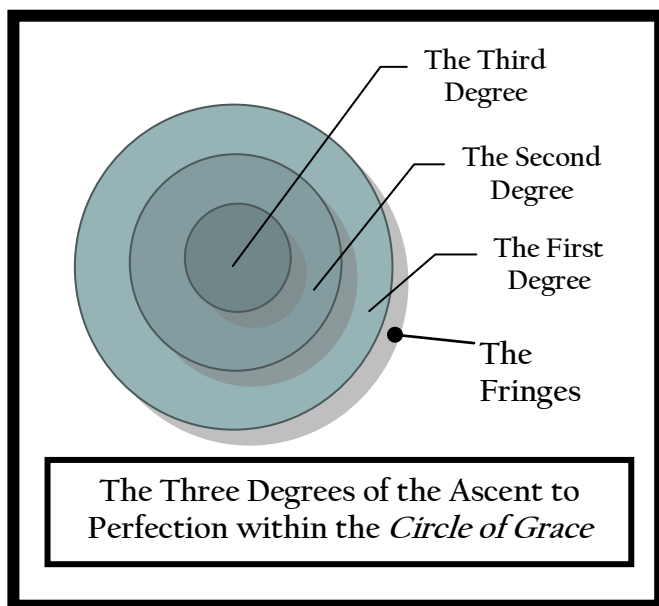
<sup>5</sup> Cf. Eph. 2:21.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Exo. 25 - 30; Rom. 15:16.

they are hardly ever noticed in the light of the outpouring of the joy that we receive from the happiness that comes from true vesselhood in God.

The disciple who joyfully *Cooperates with God* in the Second Degree is usually brought to the Third Degree (Petitions Eleven through Thirteen). What a happy chance for the soul to be purified on earth, rather than later in Purgatory. Jesus asks the disciple, ‘Do you love me?’ - to which the disciple says, ‘You know that I love you Lord!’, and Jesus charges him a final time, ‘Then follow Me!’

These final Three Petitions of the Third Degree leads the soul to being nailed to the Cross, forgiving from the Cross, praying from the Cross, loving from the Cross, and ascending to Heaven from the Cross.



The most important thing to remember about this construct of the Three Degrees of the Ascent to Perfection is for you to disregard any notion that progression through these Degrees is due to any self-merit or self-determinism. While, there is abundant grace from God available for all of the Baptized to reach perfection, it is also true that only God justifies and perfects the human soul. Human beings cannot make themselves holy! Moreover, our *Life with the Cross* is more than just a series of conversions to truth. On the contrary, our *Life with the Cross*

embodies a series of conversions to truth in love, which is truth in divinely ordered action.

The two letters attributed to St. Peter are two of the best Scriptural guides as to how the soul is slowly perfected through stages, and how Satan attempts to create division and chaos in his deathly attempt to prevent any progression of our souls towards the one he hates most.

Through the centuries, the saints have spoken in depth about the tests and trials that come shortly before God moves the soul from one degree to the next. We are perpetually admonished that Satan wages a relentless attack on the soul to prevent it from even repenting of its sins and being moved out of the *Circle of Hate* to being just on the mere fringes of the *Circle of Grace*. He does this by keeping us ignorant of our sins and from discovering that the form of love that he has to offer is actually nothing but pure hatred for God. Satan is a shrewd slave master and he will give the flesh everything that it craves for, only to keep it in bondage to his service.

The language of degrees and ascension has been used in initiation rites both ancient and new from time immemorial, but the primary difference here in the *Circle of Grace* is that *ascension* means losing all things so that we might gain everything. It means advancing by *degrees* so that we will decrease in the world and Christ will increase in us. In the world, degrees and ascension always lead to bondage, but in the *Circle of Grace*, these things lead to glory.



# SECTION TWO

DISCIPLESHIP

## *~ Chapter Three ~*

### *The First Petition*

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## **‘TO RECEIVE ETERNAL LIFE’**

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### **The Gospel of John Chapter 17:1-5**

“When Jesus had said this, He raised His eyes to Heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your Son, so that your Son may glorify you, just as you gave Him authority over all people, so that He may give eternal life to all you gave Him. Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ. I glorified you on earth by accomplishing the work that you gave me to do. Now glorify me, Father, with you, with the glory that I had with you before the world began.



ne of the most amazing things about God's desire for us to have eternal life is how easy and accessible He made it for us to have. Through repentance, Baptism, discipleship, and receiving the Sacraments, God has made it possible for anyone to receive His greatest gift.

In my early thirties, I used to drive a Jaguar automobile, and what I loved about it the most was that not many other people were driving that same type of vehicle. This is the logic of the world, is it not? *Outside* of Christ, we feel special when we have something that others do not. Case in point; Rolex produces a very nice line of wristwatches, but, practically speaking, they do not keep time any better than other less expensive watches. Indeed, the whole point in having a Rolex wristwatch is because the guy next to you doesn't.

Our *Life with the Cross* is a great irony, because whereas before I strived to be different and unique from my neighbor, now I realize that I cannot escape the fact that I will always be just like my neighbor, because we both were created in the image and likeness of God. Whereas before I believed that being like anyone else was an insult to my individual personhood, now I realize that I am less than a true person if I am not striving to be like Christ Jesus.

God is an awesome God! O' God, thank you for being my God!

## CHRIST JESUS AGONIZING IN THE GARDEN

In the hours before our Lord and our God was to be crucified on the Cross, accused of making Himself equal to God, here He was praying for *our* needs. He could have been doing any number of other things, such as praying for twelve legions of angels to come to His aid<sup>1</sup> or enjoying His favorite last meal; such as we are accustomed to providing for men and women on death row. How much does Christ Jesus love His little sisters and brothers that He spent His last breaths to lift up our needs to God the Father Almighty?

What would be your core concerns if you were to discover that you faced certain death in just a matter of hours? It was the choice of some, who were passengers on an ill-fated airplane some Septembers ago, to call

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mt. 26:53.

their loved-ones in those precious moments before the plane crashed to the ground. There have been many people who have wisely chosen prayer, and in particular the 'Our Father', in those most crucial hours before death. On the television soap operas, the characters oftentimes chose illicit carnal pleasures to be their lot before death. I do not know if that is actually realistic for a number of reasons, but I did know a man once who knew that he would die if he continued to excessively drink alcohol and actually kept drinking because it made him happy.

After giving glory to His Father, the Christ then asked for His own glory, only for the sake that He may give eternal life to everyone who the Father had given Him. The sole reason why our Lord desired to be glorified was so that the Holy Spirit could come and bring us a share of the Lord's victory.<sup>2</sup> How unselfish is our Lord? How perfectly does He know His Father's will? More importantly, how is it that He can actually give eternal life away?

***"Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ."*** This entire prayer is centered around this one request by Jesus to His eternal Father - that we should know the Father and the Son and, by doing so, have eternal life. Yet, a vital divine truth was expressed from the very outset of this prayer. That, to retain *any* gift from God, we must be willing to lovingly give it away to our neighbors, just as freely as it was given to us.

Let us digress for a moment, so that we can apply these matters in their proper context, lest we find ourselves pigeonholed into a vacuum of misunderstanding. In the preceding chapters of the Gospel of John (fourteen through sixteen), our Lord spoke in great detail about His departure and the coming of the Holy Spirit (Advocate, Paraclete, comforter), who the Father (as first principle) would send by and in union with His Son's request.<sup>3</sup> As a result of this promise, it would be through the aid of the Holy Spirit (who configures us into the Body of Christ) by whom we can come to know God the Father and the Son.

It is true that God has called all to repent,<sup>4</sup> and that response to grace (by repenting of our sins) is the first step towards Salvation, but to have eternal life is a matter of receiving the Holy Spirit, and to receive

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jn. 7:39.

<sup>3</sup> Jn. 14:16, 16:7,15; CCC 248; Nicene-Constantinople Creed (381 C.E.).

<sup>4</sup> 2 Pet. 3:9.

the great gift of the Holy indwelling<sup>5</sup> is a matter of asking and receiving through prayer alone.<sup>6</sup>

Is the beauty of the irony here too blatant for us to see? The paradox is that the aim of this prayer is directed towards our union with God, and our union with God is impossible without our cooperative prayer; for God could not have Saved man unless St. Mary first *Cooperated with His* will and prayed, “*May it be done to me according to your word.*”<sup>7</sup> The greatest exemplar that the world will ever know, Jesus the Christ, prayed that *we* might pray to know His Father. How awesome is that?

*“Know that the Lord is God, our maker to whom we belong, whose people we are, God’s well tended flock.”* (Psalm 100:3)

## ABOUT A MAN WHO PRAYED FOR HIS MARRIAGE

Not so many years ago, I came to know a man, and this man (then in prison) had been civilly married for many years. The man who I am referring to did not respond to the call to be *In Christ* until he experienced the brokenness that comes from the test and suffering. In fact, he and his wife were proud deist/agnostics up until the time of his conversion.

After he lost his first appeal in court, the year following the start of his incarceration, and was then looking to having to serve the remainder of his five to nine year sentence - his wife decided to divorce him, and in addition to that, she also stopped accepting his collect calls, hardly ever wrote him, and very rarely brought their children to visit him.

Before you assume that this man must have committed some heinous crime, let it be known that he had embezzled a sum of money from his employer, and his wife, according to him, appreciated the lifestyle that he was able to engineer for their family. Before you make the judgment that this woman was too hard of heart, let it also be known that she had never heard the good news of Christ Jesus until she had heard it from him, and she was well into her thirties by that time. This is not a story about her conversion, because as far as I know she still has not responded to the call of the Lord, which grace provides, so let us all pray for her.

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<sup>5</sup> Jn. 14:20.

<sup>6</sup> Lk. 11:13; Jn. 16:24.

<sup>7</sup> Lk. 1:38.

Now this man was truly *In Christ*! He found joy in *everything* that he had to suffer, and some people who had known him in his former state of life said that he now talked like a crazy person. That is to say, that some of his old acquaintances did not understand someone speaking of spiritual things, as he was growing accustomed to doing.

One day I asked this man, *"How is it that you can still want to be with your wife, let alone love her as a husband ought to love his wife, after she has abandoned you and does so many spiteful things to you?"* He told me that he had asked himself that very same question one day and the Lord had ministered this answer to his soul - 'that he still loves his wife greatly, because he prays for her every day. Therefore, he could not hate his wife and persistently pray for her at the same time, nor could he be unforgiving of his wife and unceasingly pray for her at the same time - the desires of the flesh and the desires of the spirit could not coexist'.

And it is true, this man would rise every morning and pray for his wife's needs and for her conversion and then he would devote a decade of the Rosary for her needs and ask the Virgin Mother to pray that his wife receive the graces and blessings that she needed the most. He would also frequently fast for her needs and would offer up Novenas to the saints for intercession with her conversion.

In the end, this woman sought her own happiness *Outside* of Christ, in spite of the pain she would cause to her own children. To console him, I had told this man that God might have allowed his wife's heart to remain hardened either for the test or merely to use him in another way. Then I told this man, of who I speak, that *"The perfect grace that God had stored up for you from the beginning is still there for you, whether you are married to her or not."*

There are many things that I do not know, but I do know that prayer had purified, perfected, and preserved this man's love for his wife and even though their civil marriage failed - it was not because of a lack of prayer on his part. This I know as well, that God had taken this man's civil marriage and sanctified it - it would have been because this man had asked for it and persevered in his request.

What this man learned from his unceasingly praying for his wife and marriage not being realized as he wished is that inasmuch as prayer is about praying that the best be done for other, sometimes the best for other may not be you. Indeed, sometimes it turns out that by praying for someone, we ourselves offer up to God the ultimate sacrifice, which is

our own life and will, and this is exactly what we see Jesus doing in the Bridegroom's Prayer.

*"Will God not then secure the rights of His chosen ones who call out to Him day and night? Will He be slow to answer them?" (Luke 18:7)*

## THE BRIDEGROOM PRAYED FOR HIS BRIDE

In the way that man, of whom I spoke, unceasingly prayed for his wife, likewise, Christ prays for the Church who is His Bride. Inasmuch as Jesus is not of the priestly bloodline of Moses or Aaron, and was not at this time praying in the Holy of Holies on the day of Atonement, that this is the perfect intercession for the people of God to God the Father, by God the Son, is something beyond clear, and for that reason I can see why many have labeled this prayer as being *High Priestly*. Notwithstanding any good intentions or interpretations of the past, I see this prayer by our Lord as not being High Priestly, as much as I see it as being a prayer of *High Intimacy*.

Most of us have been inundated with the message that the highest form of intimacy between two human beings is sex, and simultaneously we have also been inundated with the message that sex is a commodity. Essentially, this message reduces every man and woman to being nothing but sexual objects to be used for recreational pleasure. As a result, the teaching that the Lord introduces here, that *prayer* is the highest form of intimacy between the children of God, is a truth that is initially difficult for many of us to relate with. It is counter-cultural because it does not comport with our experiences in the world today.

More recently in western culture our understanding of marriage has also been dramatically attacked and skewed. Who really takes his/her vows of 'till death do us apart', 'for richer or poorer', 'in sickness and in health' or 'for better or worse' seriously anymore? It seems that the vow we enter into instead, before God and man, has become, 'I will stay married to you until you do something that I cannot forgive or until a better pleasure comes along.' Then we are inundated with the other messages from popular culture, which says that we can get divorced and remarried as many times as we would like; that adultery is not only permissible, but is even encouraged - especially for desperate housewives; and all that marriage is, is a contractual agreement, which even two men and two women can enter into together. Therefore, when Christ Jesus calls *Himself* the

Bridegroom and us (the Church, His Body) the Bride, and repeatedly likens His ministry, *Parousia*, and the end times to a wedding, marriage, and wedding feast - we have great difficulty in taking these images seriously, let alone in their true spiritual context. Our understanding of marriage is that half of them end in divorce anyway, and not “. . . *what God has joined together, no human being must separate.*”<sup>8</sup>

Every time we attend Mass we are participating in the remembrance of the New Covenant Seder and, in addition to that, we are prefiguring the Wedding Feast that is to come, when our union with God will be perfected.

At the fulfillment of this entire prayer, the Bride (who is both each one of us *and* the Church) would have become everything that the Bridegroom has ever wanted Her to be, and that is what each of these Thirteen Petitions is driving us towards, and what persevering to Eternal Life is all about - becoming one with God. That is, to be *In Christ* is to be *In* a state of Holy Matrimony with the Christ Jesus.

*“Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory. For the wedding day of the Lamb has come, His bride has made herself ready.”* (Psalm 19:7)

## THE FALL FROM GRACE

***“Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ.”*** We have already explored the understanding that eternal life means *knowing* God. That is, not as we currently know Him in our imperfect state, but to know Him later in an intimately perfect state, and to describe (in human language) this perfect state we used the Lord's own words to compare it to being in a state of Holy Matrimony (true oneness/catholicity). To speak more accurately about this Higher State, I should start from the beginning.

According to the Priestly narrative of creation, God set apart the sixth day to make His creatures of the flesh that would inhabit the same ground from which they came. The text say, “*God made all kinds of wild animals, all kinds of cattle, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth.*”<sup>9</sup> God was not done yet. He had one more animal that needed to be made before He would rest - this creature would be called *man* (Heb. *adama*)

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<sup>8</sup> Mt. 19:6.

<sup>9</sup> Gen. 1:25.

and, unlike the other animals, He would not make 'all kinds of men', but just one kind of man in two distinct sexes - male and female He made them.

A second emphasis that is made here, concerning man's uniqueness over the other animals, is when God said, "*Let Us make man in our image.*"<sup>10</sup> This implies that although there is a part of man that is like all of the other animals of the sixth day, there is also a part of him that is just like God; meaning that there is a part of man which comes *from above*. That part of man is his *image*, which we call the *soul*. As God is Spirit<sup>11</sup> and without end, so did He make man a spiritual and eternal being.

The Yahwist account of creation in the second chapter is consistent with the first. "*The Lord God [[voluntarily, gratuitously, and lovingly]] formed man out of the clay ground and blew into his nostrils [[[deposited]]] the breath of life [[[his eternal soul - source of existence]]], and so man became a living being [[[fully alive]]].*"<sup>12</sup> Later, the text says, "*the Lord God formed out of the ground various wild animals and various birds of the air.*"<sup>13</sup> Inasmuch as both men and animals were created from the ground below, only man received an eternal soul.

After having created male and female in His divine image and bringing forth all kinds of living creatures, God made the finding that what He had created on that day was 'very good'.<sup>14</sup> In other words, God who is All-Good, in turn, called humanity *good*. That was an amazing compliment from God that we should never take for granted. So there we were at the beginning of creation with the frogs, jackals, and orioles - off to a blazingly good start.

If it were not enough for God to share His own image with man, He also decreed that man should be like Him, He said, "*Let Us make man . . . after Our own likeness.*"<sup>15</sup> To be cast in the *image* of God, and to be *like* God are two completely different decrees! For example, if I were to look in the mirror and see my own image - that would be one thing, but if that same image of me also had its own will, then that would be a completely

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<sup>10</sup> Gen. 1:26.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Jn. 4:24.

<sup>12</sup> Gen. 2:7.

<sup>13</sup> Gen. 2:19.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Gen. 1:24-31.

<sup>15</sup> Gen. 1:26.

different thing. That is, God imprinted upon the soul of every man and woman some of what they needed to be *like* Him - some of what they needed to become partakers of the Divine Nature.<sup>16</sup> From the very beginning, God gave man the means to "*Be perfect, just as your Heavenly Father is perfect.*"<sup>17</sup> In contrast, the other animals of the sixth day are subject to the sensual desires of the flesh; that is, if a bear has an itch, then it goes off to find a tree to scratch itself - if a dog is in heat, then it goes off to have sex in public with another dog (or whatever it can find), but from the very beginning, humans were called to a higher standard than just to the solitary passions of their flesh.

God gave man a nature (intellect and will) of his own and embedded those powers with the desire and freedom to use them to find and be like his Creator. Every human being has embedded in them a natural passion for unity, a burning desire to search out their true source of life, willingness to love, to be vulnerable, to change according to natural inclinations, and more. Together, the nature and the desire of man form what Scripture calls the 'heart' and 'mind', and they also cement the construct of what the theologians have called the natural law.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the natural law is evident in both the individual and in the community, and this is why humans have shown themselves to be capable of great atrocities, but also why their evil is not as gross as it could be, if there were not a natural law and boundary to temper/restrain them.

These natural powers, which all men and women are born with, point to God's eternal and perpetual mercy and grace that desires to draw all of humanity back to Himself. Moreover, the evidence of these powers allows us to safely say that inasmuch as we were all born with 'humanities' Original Sin, we are also born with 'humanities' Original Virtue. That is, inasmuch as we all have the unnatural capacity to commit grave evils, we were also born with the natural capacity for much virtue.

In contrast, God has His own Divine Nature (intellect and will) and His own desires - together His nature and desires form the construct of the Divine Law. The reason why I say that man has only *some* of what He needs to become a partaker of the Divine Nature is because to be truly

<sup>16</sup> Cf. 2 Pet. 1:4.

<sup>17</sup> Mt. 5:48; Cf. Lev. 11:44; Dt. 18:13; Jas. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:16; 1 Jn. 3:3.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. CCC. 1954-60.



like God is to be truly *In* God and truly with God - this is where Adam and Eve started life at, but where we can arrive at only after Baptism. This is why the incarnation of Christ Jesus (God becoming man - Divine nature becoming hypostatically one with human nature) is such an essentially fundamental teaching in Christianity. Through man's imprint of nature and desire, we see that all humans were created, from the very beginning, to learn why they must direct their own intellect, will, and desires to be in harmony with God's; that is, we were not created to be like ourselves, but rather to be like God. "*Be perfect, just as your Heavenly Father is perfect.*"<sup>19</sup>

The three parts of man and woman are their soul, nature (mind/heart), and body. These three parts make us human beings; that is to say that, we do not have a mind, a body, and a soul, rather, we are mind, body, and soul. From the outset, we were consubstantial beings; meaning that our three parts worked in perfect harmony with each other. The consequence of 'humanities' Original Sin brought cacophony to what was symphonic. Even as we will see below, with God speaking to Adam and Eve after they had disobeyed Him, is that because of the consequence of their sin, all of their three parts were affected; that is, in their body (i.e. birth pangs, having to eat to live) and in their nature (i.e. disharmony in marriage and relationship). This internal chaos resulted in the "death of the soul";<sup>20</sup> not meaning that the soul is no longer alive, but, rather, that it cannot be fully alive. To be fully alive is to have life in God and this was impossible after 'the Fall'. Now man is inclined to sin because he is more attuned to the sensual desires of his body, rather than to the divine desires of his soul. He is more inclined to the things of this world than to the things of the Heaven.

The body is so intrinsic and necessary to our soul and nature that it becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit;<sup>21</sup> we are judged only for deeds done while *in* it,<sup>22</sup> we appear in it before Christ's tribunal,<sup>23</sup> and afterwards those who will share in the Divine life will be given a *new* body.<sup>24</sup> Because the mind, body, and soul are one (even though in a state

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<sup>19</sup> Mt. 5:48; Cf. Lev. 11:44; Dt. 18:13; Jas. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:16; 1 Jn. 3:3.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Gen. 2:17; CCC 403.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 6:19-20; 15:44-45; Eph. 2:21.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 5:10.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. CCC. 1059.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 15:42-44.

of cacophony *Outside* of Christ) I will often refer to all of them together under the guise of their body (made from the dirt/*adama*).

The Catholic Church appropriately uses the word 'wounded' to describe the cacophonous condition of our mind, body, and soul. Even though 'the Fall' *wounded* man and woman, they still desire to be *like* God and they are still equipped, through their natural powers, to be good, but because their nature is weakened due to 'the Fall', they are now naturally inclined to pursue evil rather than good. This change in the inclination of our nature, due to our first parent's choices, has been propagated down to every generation since then.

This unnatural inclination to sin is deceiving to our senses because our nature is always in pursuit of the source of its creation - it desires to find a good that it cannot discern *Outside* of Christ. For example, a prostitute is absolutely right to give her body away, to be with man, and to give others what they demand of her. "*God loves a cheerful giver.*"<sup>25</sup> She is only efforting to do what God created her to do, that is, to be like God, but because she is inclined to sin, she goes about it all the wrong way. Only *In* Christ can she properly give away her body, be with man, and serve/trust others as she ought. Similarly, the alcoholic is correct in believing there is a true drink that takes away all of his worries and fills him with true joy and purpose, but it is not alcohol. Indeed, it is true, God does call us to love on His children, but not as child molesters do!

Never be surprised that humans oftentimes express their love in the most disordered of ways. Despite what you may have heard from the world, God has never created anyone to be a practicing homosexual. There is absolutely nothing wrong with men loving men or women loving women, but homosexual acts are, by their very nature and expression, intrinsically evil and gravely disordered, and disobedient to God's will for human beings.<sup>26</sup> Because our governing nature is wounded, our actions that flow out of our nature can also prove to be disordered and sick.

This is the greatest torment of Hell - knowing that God is what your soul needs and what your heart yearns for, but not being able to dwell in Him and Him in you. In the Old Covenant, because the Spirit of God was *upon* some men it enabling them to live righteously; God dwelt amongst the people by the way of the ark of the Covenant; He sent

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<sup>25</sup> 2 Cor. 9:7.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Gen. 1:28, 2:24.

prophets to guide them and established feasts and sacrifices for thanksgiving and atonement. In these signs of mercy, we see that God has never left His creatures just to flail about in their wounded state. On the contrary, God was always drawing man to Himself, and His means of reconciliation were perfected in the coming of His Kingdom through Jesus, His Son.

Father Patrick Toner always remarked how Eve's choice was somewhat puzzling to him, because if she already intimately knew good, then why did she also want to know evil? I empathize with Eve, because I too, having come to know the Triune God, desire to become more and more like Him – it is part of my imprint to desire that, but I do not want to *be* Him. Although there was a time in my life when I did believe that I was god - that is, I knew everything that was good for me and for everyone else. Indeed, I too gave bad fruit to those I loved.

In Eve, we see how the machination of temptation courts our freewill. First, temptation calls God a liar, "*Did God really tell you not to eat of any trees in the garden?*"<sup>27</sup> How did the serpent know this information anyway? Did Adam previously resist the serpent by telling him what God had commanded them not to do? The woman, in correcting the serpent, began to eat of the fruit, which is falling into temptation by opening up the lines of dialogue, reason, and debate with Satan. In this second phase, we begin to do battle with the will of God against our self-will. "*You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God who knows.*"<sup>28</sup>

Eve now had heard all that she needed to hear; that is, she tasted the fruit (which symbolically represents the lie) and we, along with her, are fully prepared to disobey God in favor of temptation by justifying ourselves as Eve did, based on the following grounds: No, the serpent's tree is actually *not* bad, but is: (1) Good for food; (2) Pleasing to the eyes; and (3) Desirable for gaining knowledge. Adam also found Eve's reasoning to be sufficient enough to eat of the lie as well. Through our first parents, the truth of God was rejected for the lies of the Father of all lies. Later, Cain's freewill would also be courted by temptation and,

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<sup>27</sup> Gen. 3:1.

<sup>28</sup> Gen. 3:4-5.

likewise, he would find sufficient grounds to justify himself in the first murder.

St. Francis of Sales,<sup>29</sup> in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, labeled the three steps of acquiescence into sin as: (1) Temptation; (2) Delectation (delighting in the Temptation); and (3) Consent to the Temptation. Likewise, our ascent to virtue also includes three steps, which the Saint says are: (1) Inspiration (from God); Delectation; and (3) Consent (to God's Inspiration). That is, before temptation can run amuck of our understanding, senses, or memory, our freewill must *first* say 'Yes'. What we learn from Eve's failure is that to conquer temptation we must immediately turn away from it as soon as it rears its ugly head. It is so very easy to get caught up delighting in the pleasures that temptation offers, but I have also found the 'Jesus Prayer' ("*Christ Jesus, Son of God, have mercy, on me a sinner*")<sup>30</sup> to be the easiest way to effectively rebuff those temptations.

Neither God nor Satan *makes* us sin, or *makes* us say 'Yes' to temptation, or 'No' to virtue. On the contrary, the paths to holiness and to destruction yield solely to the choices that *we* make with our own free-choices. Therefore, I implore you to choose well and always choose the help of God's grace!

Unless humanity had fallen and our mind, body, and soul were wounded, I am not certain how we would have ever learned how to choose good (God) over evil (Satan). Through God's foreknowledge of the choices that our first parents would make, He imprinted on our souls some of what it needed to be redeemed one day. This process of living to know, love, and serve/trust God is what we were created to do, but He decreed that we should freely learn how to believe, trust, and faithfully

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<sup>29</sup> It was very important for me to include some mention of St. Francis in this work, of which he is also a patron through my pleading for intercession and help during its writing. He believed, contrary to the conventional wisdom of his day, that it was possible for the Catholic laity to lead holy lives while remaining in the world system, as opposed to withdrawing to monastic or cloistered life. And it is in that same spirit through which this work is being offered. "*Live Jesus.*"

<sup>30</sup> Try praying this prayer as an invocation/confession breathing exercise. That is, inhale through your nose while saying the words, 'Christ Jesus' in your head, then exhale through your nose while saying the words, 'Son of God' in your head, then inhale again with 'have mercy', and exhale a final time with 'on me a sinner'. Pray it all day long!

seek His face here on earth, rather than creating us like the angels who do not need faith to believe. We have to learn how to say 'Yes' to God, but once we confess the first 'Yes' to repentance and Baptism, thereafter we have *everything* (that is, our free choice and the Holy Spirit's help) to always say 'Yes' to God's will.

*"The first man was from earth, earthly; the second man, from Heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one, we shall also bear the image of the Heavenly one."* (1 Corinthians 15:47; 49)

## HOW ETERNAL LIFE RESTORES US TO A HIGHER STATE THAN ADAM & EVE

*"Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ."* In the beginning, it was seemingly easy enough to always choose good, because that is all humanity knew. Even the good God spoke with us and spent time with us in the Garden of Eden. All of our parts attuned to the good things of life. In that state, it was easy to know good because the conflict of concupiscence had not yet come; that is, our soul knew only good because that is all that it had to choose from.

Concerning the return to this Higher State, the Yahwist tradition offers us some clues as to what our return to being found as 'very good' before God was like by telling us about the effects that the curse would have on the flesh:

*"To the woman He said: "I will intensify the pangs of your childbearing; in pain shall you bring forth children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and He shall be your master."<sup>31</sup>*

It is true that, in a disconnected state from God, a woman hates the burden of childbirth so much that she would rather murder her own child in her womb through abortion, rather than to sacrifice even a portion of her self-will. It is also true that, *Outside of God*, men and women are not equal, though she desires him more than she yearns for God, even while she is being suppressed, oppressed, and possessed by him.

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<sup>31</sup> Gen. 3:16.

*"To the man He said: "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat, Cursed be the ground because of you! In toil shall you eat its yield all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you, as you eat of the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat, until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; For you are dirt, and to dirt you shall return."*<sup>32</sup>

It is true that ever since 'the Fall' man has feasted off one another. The fruits of humankind are imperfect, inimical, and choking as what sacred Scripture calls '*thorns and thistles*'. In contrast, through our free response to grace, to the degree of being *In Christ*, the response of our senses and temptations are properly ordered to the glory of God. Because of that transformation, woman is now joyful to bring forth new life for the sake of the love of God and, *In Christ*, she knows that she is equal to man. Likewise, man is no longer pitted against his brother and his children are not raised to be '*thorns and thistles*', but rather to love God and to seek peace.

In consequence of God's grace, the return to dirt is no longer a punishment for humans or a permanent condition, as being *In Christ* means to live in the spirit - seeking union with what comes from above, rather than what comes from below. Where sin abounded, the grace of God abounded all the more. Adam and Eve, through disobedience, came to know both good and evil, but they lacked the discernment and ability to only choose good. By being *In Christ*, we not only *know* both good and evil, but we are also empowered by the Holy Spirit to always choose good *over* evil.

This is the return to Higher State of which I speak, and this is the way of eating from the *other* tree in the middle of the Garden, which is the Tree of Life - Christ Jesus. This is the reason why God removed our parents from the Garden and calls each one of us at specific points along our journey in the valley to be cleansed of humanities' 'Original Sin' (through the Sacrament of Baptism). For if, we were to eat of the tree anytime before we were ready (cleansed), it would have made what was sinful and wounded, eternally wounded, and that could not be! For,

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<sup>32</sup> Gen 3:17-19.

what is Holy and eternal would not eternally contend with what is wounded.<sup>33</sup>

In Cooperating with God - the Life with the Cross I treated John's play on the Genesis creation narrative in detail for John's first two chapters, but even in chapter three John continues as it recounts a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus. Jesus said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above."<sup>34</sup> To paraphrase what Jesus was telling Nicodemus, 'As man was born from above before his fall, so too must he be born *again* from above to be redeemed after his fall'. In other words, as God created man from what comes from above before 'the Fall', so also does He redeem man from what comes from above after 'the Fall' - that is, through His Son Christ Jesus. "For in Him were created all things in Heaven and on earth . . . all things were created through Him and for Him."<sup>35</sup> For John, the Baptized person represents a type of Noah after 'the Flood'. Whereas the dove returned to the Ark, bearing fruit, was a sign of the beginning of Noah's new life on earth,<sup>36</sup> so too does God send us the Holy Spirit, descending like a dove and bearing heavenly fruit at the beginning of our new eternal life In Christ.

*"We also know that the Son of God has come and has given us discernment to know the one who is true. And we are in the one who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life."*

(1 John 5:20)

## ON KNOWING GOOD & EVIL & CHOOSING *ONLY* GOOD

*"Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ."* To know both Good and Evil and to always choose good is the expectation of us from God for those of us who have received His gift of the Holy Spirit.

Many teachers have given us many different constructs to bridge the gap between our soul and the Spirit. Some have told us to stay within the boundaries of the Decalogue, or to measure our daily attitudes against the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount, and some have

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Gen. 6:3.

<sup>34</sup> Jn. 3:3.

<sup>35</sup> Col. 1:16.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Gen. 8:8-11.

even said that a good spiritual director can help. I cannot dissuade you from any of these approaches to God, as all of them and many others have helped me greatly along the way, but what I have to offer you, through this series on *Cooperating with God*, is the three approaches that have aided me the most; those being: a passion for these Thirteen Petitions, following Jesus to Mt. Calvary, and loving God, neighbor, and self to the best of my growing ability. The former is the subject of this book.

To live the Thirteen Petitions of this prayer is to have a Spirit-filled attitude. In other words, if you truly desire to take the Kingdom of God with violence,<sup>37</sup> then within these Petitions is where you want to be, because therein is found an abundance of God's grace. It is God the Father who has *already* answered this prayer that was offered up by His beloved and only begotten Son. Therefore, every apportioned grace to fulfill these petitions is available to those who seek and knock, for it was the Christ who asked and received.

Some people say that they *found Jesus*, but I was not lucky enough to have that as my testimony. On the contrary, Jesus was not the one who was lost - I was. He was the one who found me in very desperate straits in my early thirties. By the hour of my Baptism I had come to intimately know evil and, despite my spiritual death and resurrection, the consequence of the memory of my sins has stayed with me. It is the oddest of things that triggers the dead man's memories, but I am so grateful to have them, as not only reminders of how fortunate I am that Jesus rescued me from myself, but also to now know the previous state of sin that I was in. There was a time when I did not even believe in sin.

It is true, that even the worst enemies of God do only good. You meant to say '*do only evil*' right? No, it is true what I said in the first instance, that we can only do good, even though an evil man's good is actually evil in the eyes of God; and paradoxically, the man who wills sin only sees good in his sin. For example, once upon a time, there was a character named Robin Hood who stole from the rich and gave to the poor. I would like to raise the point that Mr. Hood's thievery was morally evil, of which he and many of us have poignantly found to be in the category of a 'good deed'. There was a king who heavily taxed his people only so he could host lavish banquets and feed himself and his

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Lk. 16:16.



friends to no end. I call this king a gluttonous crook, but he and his friends called themselves 'well fed and very full'. Then there was that married man who occasionally frequented a local brothel. We all know this man to be an adulterer and, possibly, on his way to Hell, but he calls himself 'well pleased and happily married'. You see how we have returned to Eve's justification? My key point here is that *Outside of God* our source of knowing what is good, is wounded - even bankrupt, to say the least. Therefore, my goal here is not to make you will the good through these Petitions, but to rather point you to the source and author of All Good, so that you might know what *good* is. "*Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.*"<sup>38</sup>

Every time we sin against God is yet another time when we have gotten to intimately know evil. If I would have never experienced sex, I would never have known how well it satisfied the disordered desires of the flesh. Yes, knowing evil is the easy part, for we have known and will continue to know Satan and his temptations until his end. In contrast, to intimately know good is to know the source of all good, which is God. To know God, as we have already discussed, is first, a matter of repentance and asking to receive the Holy Spirit. Secondly, it is about providing a suitable climate within our temple where the Holy Spirit can dwell and flourish, and lastly, it is always about choosing God *over* Satan in every single one of our thoughts and actions and throughout everyday of our lives.

This prayer of our Lord focuses all of our efforts on what I just mentioned to be second in order here. That is, if we actively engage in knowing God by seeking His will through the experience of relationship (which is His prayer), and as a result His will becoming our will, then we will be *In Christ*; that is, in a participatory state of knowing what God deems to be good for humanity. In other words, by participating with Christ in this prayer, what is good for God (His will) has, through union, become what is good for us (our Cooperative will). Living a life in which doing the will of God is the chief priority in our life is the hope of the next twelve Petitions.

*"Before man are life and death, whichever he chooses  
shall be given him." (Sirach 15:17)*

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<sup>38</sup> 1 Jn. 4:8.

# ~ *Chapter Four* ~

## *The Second Petition*

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### **‘TO OBEY THE WORD OF THE FATHER’**

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#### **The Gospel of John Chapter 17:6**

I revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.

**H**ave you ever noticed how much easier it is to praise and worship God, than it is to be completely obedient to Him every day? If praise and worship were all that we needed to do to please God, perhaps there would be a lot fewer people in Hell right now.

There was an old monk who lived high up in the mountains over a small village in Europe. Everyday several villagers would make the arduous climb up the mountain to propound profound and difficult questions to the monk. There was a young lad who made the tough journey every day, regardless of the weather or the demands on his time during the harvest season.

One day, the young lad visited the monk and said, *"I want to be a holy saint in Heaven after I die, but I also want to do better right now. I want to stop sinning against the God who I love, but I can't! Tell me, wise monk, how can I grow in holiness and virtue in this life?"*

After the old monk slowly and carefully looked the boy up and down - examining him, he finally said, *"You look like very healthy boy and I do not see anything wrong with you. You look up to the task of becoming perfect."*

*"Thank you wise sir, but tell me how!"* the young lad persisted.

The monk said, *"Young man, I use to make the same climb up this mountain, as you do now, many years ago. I did it with the help if this sturdy walking stick that I call 'Grace'. I now give her to you. If you truly want to be perfect, I want you to take 'Grace' and, likewise, you too climb to the top of this mountain every day of your life, and when you have found the answer to your question never return to the village below, but, instead, find a dry cave on this range and devote your life to the service of the Lord. And when a friend comes to ask you the very question that you have asked me this day, just pray that he too can make equal use of Grace."*

## ON THE PRIMACY OF CHRIST & THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

Through Christ Jesus, God the Father opened the door for us to be fully reconciled to Him. On this subject, the Psalmist said, *"YHWH says to you, my Adonai: "Take your throne at my right hand, while I make your enemies*

your footstool.”<sup>1</sup> To that, Christ Jesus added, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and everyone that does He prunes so that it bears more fruit.”<sup>2</sup> Then St. Paul writing to the Churches at Corinth said, “For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.” The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for “He subjected everything under His feet”. But when it says that everything has been subjected, it is clear that it excluded the one who subjected everything to Him, when everything is subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will [also] be subjected to the one who subjected everything to Him, so that God may be all in all”.<sup>3</sup>

God the Father established the order of grace for our sake, so that whosoever responds to the call to believe in His Son would be reconciled to Him,<sup>4</sup> and as a due result of being reconciled to Him, we would also be reconciled to our neighbor and all of creation. As sin harmed our relationship with God, neighbor, and self, the Salvation (healing) of Christ Jesus cleanses us from that which tore us apart. That is, the enmity, cacophony, and brokenness that naturally persists between humans (individuals and the community), between humans and other animals, and between humans and nature, because of humanities’ Original Sin, is destroyed when we are reconciled to God through His Son. Indeed, the more people who are reconciled to God, the better off the whole world will be. This is why it is so vitally important for each of us who are *In Christ* to be ambassadors for Christ and, thereby, allow God to appeal to His creatures through us, so that they may come to the knowledge of the condition of their soul and be reconciled to the Father and fully configured into the Body of Christ. As the Apostle wrote, “For our sake He made Him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”<sup>5</sup>

It is true, that through the Ministry of Reconciliation, our Heavenly Father has made His only begotten Son the true stumbling block for those who would search for Him outside of His beloved Son. It saddens me that there are some amongst us who are ashamed to tell their

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. 110:1.

<sup>2</sup> Jn. 15:1-2.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 15:25-28.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jn. 3:16.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Cor. 5:21.

neighbors that 'they can do nothing without Jesus'<sup>6</sup> or to boldly proclaim to the doubtful and ignorant that 'You cannot have the Father without the Son'.<sup>7</sup> This is the fruit of the good news, that God sent His divine Son to die a human death so that all humans might share in the divine life.

Why not shout from every rooftop in every city, town, and village that 'only at the name of Christ Jesus will every knee bend and every tongue confess that He is Lord'<sup>8</sup> and let those who will be converted be converted, and those who will be condemned, condemn themselves? Notwithstanding the conviction of such prophets of God, the beauty of God's mercy is that He can grant eternal life to anyone whom He chooses, even to the blind, the mute, the aborted infant, or the woman on an island who never even heard of the Kingdom of God. For our Father in Heaven is sovereign and Salvation belongs to Him. The most that we can do is to *Cooperate with Him*.

The greatness of the Primacy of Jesus and the Ministry of Reconciliation rest not in the fact that God did it and it was so, but in His *reason* for doing it. I have three daughters who I cannot imagine not loving. There is *nothing* that they can do that can make me love them any more or less than when I first loved them in their mother's womb. How much more perfectly does our Father in Heaven love His children? How is it that God made a way out of no way for us? We will explore the answer to these questions later in Chapter Thirteen, but for now let it suffice to say that we could not have become saints on our own, so He sent us the Way, the Life, and the Truth through the manifested glory of His perfect Son Christ Jesus, because He loves us.

***"They belonged to you, and you gave them to me."*** Therefore, those who have responded to the call to be reconciled to God, through His Son, now belong to Christ are *In Christ* and are thereby grafted into the vine - whereas before, they belonged to the Father. That is, through God's grace (love) they were permitted to exist in the world in hopes that they would respond to grace and be Saved. The hope of God is that we will all cooperate by saying 'Yes' to His invitation to be Saved and a citizen of His Kingdom.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Jn. 15:5.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Jn. 6:65.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Rom. 14:11.

*“He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation. For in Him were created all things in Heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the Church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He Himself might be preeminent. For in Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile all things for Him, making peace by the blood of His Cross [through Him], whether those on earth or those in Heaven.” (Colossians 1:15-20)*

## THAT THE MEANING OF THE NAME OF OUR HOLY FATHER IS ‘HOLY LOVE’

*“I revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world.”* I have longed with great enduring effort, to remove the word ‘who’ from my vocabulary for two reasons: First, because unless the answer to ‘who’ is ‘Jesus Christ’, then the answer to ‘who’ has absolutely no power to change anything. In other words, the answer to ‘who’ almost never gives me a workable answer to my questions. Secondly, because the answer to ‘who’ usually only leads to gossip. Essentially, the only value that ‘who’ has is when it follows the questions of ‘what’ or ‘why’.

Furthermore, ‘who’ is just a linguistic tease - verbal foreplay, which along with ‘where’ and ‘when’ can only provide unsubstantive facts where they are invoked. That is, ‘who stole my car’, ‘when did they steal it’, and ‘where is it now’ are great and timely questions, but ‘why did they steal my car’ and ‘what did they do with it after they stole it’, are the only questions that can make a true and lasting difference. In other words, the answer to ‘who’ is typically external; meaning that the answer to ‘who’ is oftentimes something that I cannot change because it deals with issues that are outside of self. Indeed, the answer to ‘who stole my car’ might change every time that my car is stolen, but ‘why/how and when did they steal my car’ can generate internally directed questions and answers that will point back to self, and inspire me to make the necessary changes in my behavior and the ease of accessibility that ‘whoever’ has to my car. This same principle applies to our names. Who I am is David LaMonte Gray, a name with little value and only passing family tradition.

What I am is Yoseph Daviyd, meaning the beloved/prince of God who He will add to and/or increase.

When the Holy God descended to deliver the Israelites, He seemed to be tickled by Moses' first question, "*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?*"<sup>9</sup> Who Moses was, was a very irrelevant question, but that he was to be used as a vessel for God's glory was subsequently made very clear. To paraphrase God's answer to Moses, 'I will be in you Moses, all the way, and I will lead my people out of Egypt and they will worship me, lest the delivery belongs to you and they worship you.'<sup>10</sup>

Moses then anticipated the Israelites way of thinking, ". . . if they ask me, *'What is His name?'* what am I to tell them?"<sup>11</sup> What we have here is humanity, barefoot standing on Holy ground, in the presence of He who is all Holy, talking to a bush, and this is the best question that it could muster . . . Granted, back in Egypt, there was a pantheon of gods with many different names, so Moses' question did have some merit, but you think he had to be kicking himself later for not asking God the more profound questions, such as, 'What are you?' or 'Why are you?' To the contrary, Moses knew that the Holy God had just met a man of dirt on dirt's level and that this Holy God had a very keen interest in interceding on behalf of His people. 'He must love His children greatly,' mused Moses. 'In fact,' Moses must have thought to himself, 'Who He is, What He is, and Why He is - is Love'.

The words in the Nicene-Constantinople Creed, "*God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,*" speaks to the nature of God, that Jesus is the very same substance as God the Father and the Holy Spirit proceeds from that very same substance as well. I now give this substance a name - *Love*. The substance and the nature of God is Love. This is why the Apostle John said "*God is Love*"<sup>12</sup> and this is why the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah called God's Love "*everlasting*."<sup>13</sup>

It has been said that if we can use words to describe it then it is not God, and I agree that God is far above human words, images, and whatever else is intrinsically human, for He is God. Yet, Love is the one

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<sup>9</sup> Exo. 3:11.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Exo. 3:12.

<sup>11</sup> Exo. 3:13.

<sup>12</sup> 1 John 4:8, 16.

<sup>13</sup> Isa 54:8; Jer. 31:3.

concept, idea, thought, emotion, feeling, and belief that God has given us to understand Him and His divine will. All of our life, God gives us just a taste of what perfect Love will be like through our experiences in marriage, parenting, childhood, and friendship. If you are like me, your experience in marriage, parenting, childhood, and friendship were not what you would call anything close to being the human ideal of perfect, but to experience the pain of disordered love is what makes us yearn even more for the experience of divine perfection. The divine substance of Love, eternal in the Heavens, will purify and teach us the way to Love as we rightly ought. This is the mission of the Holy Spirit in us.

The call to be Holy (catholic, whole, one, perfect, complete), “*So be perfect, just as your Heavenly Father is perfect,*”<sup>14</sup> is also the call to Love, “*This I command you; love one another.*”<sup>15</sup> Whereas, I have been known to say that ‘*God is Catholic*’ and now I say that the name of God is Love, please do not assume the contradiction or that I have named the unnameable. The goal here is not so much to make theologically precise statements, than it is to lead you into a child’s experience with God. Yet, I have put my foot into something here that needs a little more precision, lest I mislead you.

To clarify how God is Holy and the meaning of His name is not Holy, per se, but is Love; I begin by saying that in every single way that our human minds can perceive and define God, we must first prefix our words with the word ‘Holy’. In other words, God is Love, that is, *Holy* Love; God the Father is the *Holy* Father; God is *Holy* Light; God is *Holy* Good at all times. In addition, when speaking of the nature and the substance of God, we must call it a *Holy* nature and a *Holy* substance. According to the *Gospel of John*, this is the God who Christ Jesus brought us, who is the *Holy* Heavenly Father and *Holy* Love. Therefore, the absurdity is also true, that there was nothing Holy about the Roman Empire.

Now, when I say that the meaning of the name of God is Holy Love, please do not assume the contradiction again - that I have named He who cannot be contained in spoken words. Inasmuch as God cannot be contained, paradoxically, what allowed Him to be contained in the womb of the Virgin Mary was divine love.

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<sup>14</sup> Mt. 5:48.

<sup>15</sup> Jn. 15:17.



When asked what my name is, I would say Yoseph Daviyd, and a person who is well versed in languages or name meaning would thereby come to know me through the meaning of my name - a meaningful first impression of such. When asked the same question by Moses, God said, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh" (*I Am who Am / To Be / YHWH*). Inasmuch as God's answer to Moses' question was more of a holy statement than name, I believe that the fullness of the revealed name is unveiled in the Greek word *katholokos* (*catholic*), but I should go a step further still, for precisions sake.

As I have already explained, God is always Holy first. The implication of this divine truth is brought to life when we envision Him pointing to Himself (which is His substance) and saying the word "I" as He inhales deeply. It is true that "I" (or "To") here means 'Holy' (i.e., one, complete, whole, catholic, full, perfect, all in all). Next, God stretches His arms outward and perpendicular, and breathes out the word "Am" (or "Be") as He exhales fully. It is true, "Am" must follow "I" with God, because *Am* is the natural outpouring of His Holy Nature and out of God's Holiness (oneness, completeness, wholeness, catholicity, fullness, perfection, and allness) proceeds His Love. Therefore, the proper meaning of the spiritual translation of the divine name of God, as revealed to Moses, "*I Am who Am*," is "*Holy Love who Loves*," and "*This is what you shall tell the Israelites: Love sent me to you.*"

So, when Jesus said in His prayer, "***I revealed your name to those whom you gave me . . .***," the name that He is speaking of here is Holy Love. Be encouraged to disregard all thoughts that the Lord gave His Apostles some secret or gnostic name of the Father or the true pronunciation of the divine name (YHWH). The High Priest Caiaphas supposedly knew the ineffable name of God and he was no better for it! Even the Freemasons claim to know the real name of God, but remain dead slaves to their deist philosophy. There is no secret here for those who are *In Christ*.

The meaning of the name of God was revealed in the name of Immanuel (God with us).<sup>16</sup> Why is God with us? For the very same reason that He was with Moses and the Israelites. The meaning of the name of God is revealed in the name of Jesus [Yeshua] (God Saves).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Isa. 7:14.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Mt. 1:32.

Why does God Save? For the very same reason that He saved the Israelites. Who named He who was first? God is Holy Love and He Loves us perfectly!

As I wrote in Chapter One, Christ Jesus did not come and propound to us the question, 'What would Jesus do?' Yet, if we were to ever wonder, 'What would Love have done in the Garden of Gethsemane?' - would we not have come to believe that Love would have fallen down on his knees and prayed for those he loved, just as Christ did? What if Love heard this prayer? Would Love not have opened up her entire treasury of grace to answer every one of these Petitions, just as God the Father did? What if you discovered that God wanted to give you a new name - the name Love? Would you accept it? Tell me! What would Love do? Would Love *Cooperate with God*?

*"Our soul waits for the Lord, who is our help and shield, For in God our hearts rejoice; in your Holy Name we trust. May your kindness, Lord, be upon us; we have put our hope in you."* (Psalm 33:20-22)

## HOW ONE MAN FOUND MEANING IN LIFE, LOST IT, & FOUND IT AGAIN

Here is a story about a man I knew. Well, I had known this man all of his life actually - when he was young in flesh and I was old in Spirit. The man of who I now speak discovered at an early age that he was not whole, and his soul yearned deeply for companionship. As a boy, he would attend various protesting churches with no regularity, and when he went to university he dabbled in Islam, Wicca, and later *being totally opposed to religion* became his faith. The man was actually well versed in religion, to the degree that he could find something wrong with all of them, especially Christianity, but he was very ignorant in regards to true faith.

To appease his need for companionship he constantly courted relationships with women to fill that void. His desire to feel love was as strong as his desire to give love, even though he did not know that the love he was receiving and giving was terribly flawed, being that he was not *In Christ*. So, like Adam and the animals, neither could this man find a suitable partner for his soul. As his search for meaning in life continued he became a busybody and joined every social, fraternal, dining, athletic,

civil service organization, and club that he thought would benefit him. It is true that power, position, and prestige became his source of pride (which was his *new* love), and, ironically, which he also manipulated to find more women to conquer (as he called it).

I could go on and on and give many more examples of how this man sought meaning in life, but no term probably sums it up better than the rule of the 'American Dream'; that is, the accumulation of temporal things, mask, and sin. This lie from Satan teaches that if you acquire a certain quantity or quality of things, you will have achieved a level of success amongst your peers. All market-driven societies teach this same principle - essentially, it is a way for those who are *Out of Christ* to keep score with one another. In the days that our Lord walked the earth, it was the kinship based driven society. A person was judged by what family they belonged to and what their rank was in that extended family. Similar to how society functions in modern small Mexican towns or in the pre-integration Black American community. In the kinship based society social status is gained by being admired or shamed by your peers, community, family, and neighbors. Therefore, when Jesus said, "*For whoever does the will of my Heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother,*"<sup>18</sup> Christ, in an instant, made vulnerable the stone upon which society had been built, redefined what *true* family is, and nullified the importance of social standing in favor of Heavenly standing.

In the same way, the modern market-driven society, where everything is based upon money, the market, and what quantity and quality of temporal things that you have accumulated, the message of Jesus the Christ subverts it and exposes it as being nothing but a lie from Satan. Any society that is not based upon Christ, is a society built upon the rock of superficiality and meaninglessness, both of which are offenses against the name (love) of God.

It could have been this man's portion to live in this lie for the rest of his life and he would have been content, though still disorderly seeking that unique fulfillment. Fortunately for this man he had a praying grandmother and the Lord answered her petition. When the suffering came upon this man and all of his accumulated wealth, degrees, titles, associations, and temporal goods didn't do him any good - he then

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<sup>18</sup> Mt. 12:50.

realized that he was wearing a mask and was woken up to his pitiful, miserable, and sinful state.

In addition to that, he also discovered that he did not even love himself and his response to that sad fact was to further reject grace by committing suicide. As he lay on his bed with plastic over his face and a knot around his neck, Jesus spoke to him and said, *"I love you. I am here."* This is what the man told me and I believe him. The love that he had sought all his life and in all of the wrong places, found *him* and spoke to him. Jesus came to this man and gave him that true meaning in life, which can only come from being *In Christ*, because He is the Way, the Life, and the Truth. *Outside of God* there are only lies and self-destruction.

*"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." (Matthew 16:25)*

## GETTING TO KNOW GOD THROUGH HIS FULL WORD

Books and written words allow for the possibility of the brain to accomplish four things: (1) Obtain knowledge; (2) Form Thoughts and Opinions; (3) Form Hypothesis; and (4) Form Theories. Until these four things encounter reality through the test of firsthand experience, they all remain to be ineffective and inadequate in dealing with real life situations. The irony of sacred Scripture is that it is full of stories of people that actually took the time to *experience* life with God; people who failed and got back up with His help. Inasmuch as all faithful Jews devoted themselves to the study of Scripture, they also understood that to *Cooperate with God* they had to leave the book and go be *used* by Him. Indeed, the path to sainthood is tied to the path of experiencing God in the *Life with the Cross*.

The full word of God is the visible and invisible manifestation of His love and grace. In other words, the word of God is evident in all that we see in His visible creation and what our eyes cannot perceive in the Heavens. The word of God cannot be contained, enslaved, or micromanaged by any human expression or device (i.e. print, thought, art, imagination, media, language, and etcetera), because it (the word) is far beyond and more perfect than anything that we could possibly understand. *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my*

ways, says the Lord.”<sup>19</sup> The word of God is not an object or a book or a thing to be controlled. On the contrary, the word of God is a person and His name is Jesus Christ.

It was not Scripture, but, rather, it was God Himself who condescended to give Samuel a revelation concerning Eli, and this occurred in a day when “revelation of the Lord was uncommon and vision infrequent.”<sup>20</sup> The Prophet Isaiah said the child born of the virgin would be named Immanuel,<sup>21</sup> but because Joseph named the child Jesus, he must have believed that the words of the angel of the Lord in his dream were more authoritative than Scripture. In fact, Joseph went on to have three other authoritative dreams, as recorded in Matthew.<sup>22</sup> It was angels, not the Bible, who announced the coming of Savior to St. Mary and the shepherds.<sup>23</sup> The Scriptures did not tell John the Baptist who he was, nor did it tell him that his cousin was the Lamb of God.<sup>24</sup> The Bible did not brief Simeon or the prophetess Anna about who that infant at the Temple was.<sup>25</sup> It was not through the Bible that the disciples, on the road to Emmaus, came to know Jesus as risen, but, rather, it was through the Breaking of Bread.<sup>26</sup> It was a vision (not Scripture) that revealed God’s plan concerning the gentiles to St. Peter.<sup>27</sup> According to Acts and Galatians, St. Paul was not converted by reading the New Testament.<sup>28</sup> More importantly, Jesus did not command His Apostles to write a New Testament or canonize a Bible.

If humanity can find God in the Bible, but not in nature, then the result is reckless deforestation, dams, and landfills. If humanity can find God in the Bible, but not in the animals, then the result is over domestication and humanization of animals and sport hunting. If humanity can find God in the Bible, but not in His special presence in their own neighbor, then the result is objectification, manipulation,

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<sup>19</sup> Isa 55:8.

<sup>20</sup> 1 Sam. 3:1.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Isa. 7:14.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Mt. 1:18 - 2:23.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Lk. 1:26-38; 2:15-20.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Jn. 1:29-34.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Lk. 2:25-38.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Lk. 24:1-33.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Acts. 10:9-49.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Acts 9:19.

idolatry, slavery, prostitution, war, genocide, euthanasia, abortion, and capital punishment. “Be *doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his own face in a mirror. He sees himself, then goes off and promptly forgets what he looked like.*”<sup>29</sup>

Getting to know God through Scripture is a great start, but until you take up your Cross and begin your journey to Mount Calvary, you may never truly know anything about who God is, how much He loves you, or who you are in relation to Him. Just reading about God can only take you so far. Indeed, the quickest way to become spiritually stuck is by becoming a victim of Biblical irony. What I mean by that is that the Bible is full of stories of people who actually got off their butts and went out to experience and know God; people who went in search of God and made their *own* story and witness. Living the *Life with the Cross* is about putting the *written* word of God to work by going out there and loving on neighbor, being the Good Samaritan, being someone's Simon of Cyrene and helping him or her to carry their Cross. That is how the *written* word becomes the *living* word in our hearts. Reading about God is good. *Cooperating with God* is better!

To truly live in the word of God, one has to remain open to the possibility of discovering God everywhere and in everything. In all things that God has created, you can discover the great mystery of His plan and purpose for your life. God is truly everywhere and in everything<sup>30</sup> and to see the presence of God everywhere and in every ‘thing’ is to be free to respond to His presence everywhere and through every ‘thing’. The rich opportunity to find truth *and* to be tempted into error exist, both, in what God created with His own word and in the word that men were inspired to write in their own language.

I challenge anyone to consider these words, which are some of the synonyms of the true meaning of the word of God; they are: Love, Truth, Empowering, and Transforming. It is true that whenever these four words occur within or through us, it was a definite happy chance for the common will of God to be achieved on earth. We must always believe that Holy encounters with the word of God comes to pass not only when we understand sacred Scripture, but also at every second of the day when

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<sup>29</sup> Jas. 1:22.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Ps. 139:7-10.

the grace of God presents us with an opportunity for one conversion experience after another through Holy Love, Holy Truth, Holy Empowerment, and Holy Transformation.

*"You search the Scriptures, because you think you have eternal life through them; even they testify on my behalf. But you do not want to come to me to have life." (John 5:39)*

## A SHORT TREATMENT ON ACCEPTING LOVE & REMAINING IN LOVE

*" . . . and they have kept your word."* To Cooperate with God in this Petition means to keep the word of God the Father, but what is His word? If the text in this prayer had used an uppercase 'W', then our work would have been relatively easy, given 'Word' is translated from the Greek noun *Logos*, which means 'reason; rationality; or meaning'. Is there a true difference though? To answer these questions, let us now pull together briefly some of what we have already previously discussed in detail to see if we can still make our task light here. In the *Preface*, the question put forth was, 'What did Jesus bring that was new?', and the answer to this question, according to all of the Gospels (most especially *John*), was that Jesus of Nazareth brought us the *means* to be reconciled to God 'our Father' through the Sacraments of the Kingdom of God.

Drawing from the previous Reflection, we asked, 'What name did Jesus reveal as the name of the Father?', and the answer to that question was that God, who was first, is unnameable, but the meaning of His name is Holy Love. I also said that every way in which our feeble human minds can perceive God, must first be prefaced with the word 'Holy' and God, being first Holy, can only manifest Love. Therefore, the lowercase *logos* here means *Love*. That is, Love is the *reason, rationality, and meaning* of God. Every reason behind every action of God is Love. The rationality behind every decision of God is Love. God is Love.

If it is true that to keep some 'thing', we must have at some time prior been given it, then, at what point in time were we given this word that we have also kept? To answer this question let us go beyond the command to Love as recorded in the *Gospel of John*, "This I command you;

love one another,”<sup>31</sup> and point to the entire ministry, message, example, and life of the Christ. As the Church teaches, Jesus is of the same nature and substance as His Father and He came in the name of His Father, even while He walked in the human flesh (incorrupt dirt). This is the Holy mystery and the true paradox: Jesus the Christ, both God and Man, born of Woman who is perpetually a Virgin. Because Christ Jesus is God, Love is also the central motive behind every single one of His reasons and rationalities. The answer is, the *word* that we were given was the life of Christ.

I challenge you to show me an example from the Annunciation to the Ascension, where by word or deed that our Lord did not command us to Love! Now, my next challenge is more difficult than the first; if you believe that God the Father answered the prayer of His only begotten Son, then you must also believe that grace has been set aside for you to *Cooperate with God* and fulfill this Petition. Therefore, I challenge you to belong to Christ; to remain in the vine and to be joyful in the pruning, so that you may bear more fruit.

To *Cooperate with God* in this Petition (to Obey the word of the Father), in the first place, we must never limit God in any manner or form. Be sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in you and allow Him to speak to you - not only through sacred Scripture, but also through all of His Love, Truth, Empowering, and Transforming grace. Allow God to minister to your soul through anyone or anything that *He* chooses for you, rather than what *you* choose for yourself. The second is a paradox - that to keep what was freely given to us, we must, in turn, give it away just as freely. Otherwise, it is not *Cooperating with God*, but, rather, Dictating to God.

*“You shall not take the [[love]] of the Lord, your God in vain. For the Lord will not leave unpunished him who takes His [[love]] in vain.”*  
(Exodus 20:7)

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<sup>31</sup> Jn. 15:17.



# ~ *Chapter Five* ~

## *The Third Petition*

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### **‘TO KNOW THE FATHER THROUGH THE SON’S ELECTION’**

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#### **The Gospel of John Chapter 17:7-10**

Now they know that everything you gave me is from you, because the words you gave to me I have given to them, and they accepted them and truly understood that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for the ones you have given me, because they are yours, and everything of mine is yours and everything of yours is mine, and I have been glorified in them.

**T**here is nothing more important in life than knowing Christ Jesus. All things flow from this sure knowledge,<sup>1</sup> and it is only through the Catholic Church that the Holy Spirit teaches the full and fully authentic crucified and risen Lord Jesus.

I have been blessed to have received a good education, to have done some traveling, read some books, and had some bright friends, and, as a result of all that, I do well in trivia games, but if I had to choose, I would choose to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. It would be enough just to know how much God loves me.

When we come to know the authentic Christ Jesus, it empowers us to more fully know His Father, the Holy Spirit, and ourselves. When I was a protester I found myself oftentimes being spiritually stuck, not able to grow In Christ, not able to move anywhere in my spiritual boat. Indeed, this is a great tragedy for any soul, but one that can be avoided when the authentic Christ Jesus is preached and received. Whenever and wherever the inauthentic Christ Jesus has been taught it has always led to doctoral error!<sup>2</sup> This is why the Mormons, Muslims, Jehovah Witnesses, Christian Science adherents, and etcetera all believe Jesus to be someone other than who He actually is. All of these paths are inadequate to having true life in Christ.

## HOW IT IS THAT WE COME TO KNOW JESUS

*"When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi He asked His disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'"<sup>3</sup> It is true that how we know Jesus and what we know about Him is also how and what we know about God the Father. "Philip said to Him, 'Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.'" Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing His works. Believe me that I am*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mt. 6:33.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Gal. 1:6-9.

<sup>3</sup> Mt. 16:13.

in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves.”<sup>4</sup>

There is no answer to a question that shapes our walk as human beings more than the one that has been solicited by Christ Jesus to all generations, “Who do you say that I am?” It has been revealed to the saints that we must never be ashamed to hear Christ ask us, “Do you still not know me”? For, we are all called to unceasingly search for deeper knowledge of God, and if we seek we are promised to find.<sup>5</sup>

Thus proving that the mob-mentality (majority rules), without the aid of the Holy Spirit, is usually wrong, the disciples told Jesus that the people thought that He was a type of a number of the prophets - this according to the text from the Gospel of Matthew.

† Some said that Jesus was John the Waymaker -

John was a radical revolutionary prophet from the fringes of society, rather than from the inner circle; popular for calling the Israelites to the ritual of water baptism and repentance; said that he was preparing the way for someone greater than himself; he was simple, humble, imprisoned, and murdered by the government for speaking the truth.

† Others said that He was Elijah the Tishbite -

Elijah was another humble and simple prophet with peculiar dress and a solitary life like John the Waymaker; also known to have confronted kings; had a similar encounter as Moses with the God who never shows His face to man; known for miracles; had taken special interest in Elisha, who he prepared to succeed him; was caught up on a chariot of fire into a whirlwind, into the sky.

† Still others said that Jesus was Jeremiah -

Jeremiah was a prophet with adventures of youth that are shrouded in mystery; known for very bold and passionate speeches and calls to repentance; the people always sought his life; was disliked; thrown into prison; saved by an Ethiopian eunuch; mourned greatly for his people's disobedience; according to sacred Scripture, the nature of his death is uncertain.

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<sup>4</sup> Jn. 14:8-11.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Prov. 8:17; Jer. 29:13; Mt. 7:7; Acts. 17:27.

By calling Him an Elijah, John the Waymaker, and Jeremiah, the mob was consistent in calling our Lord a prophet - but don't the Jews kill all of their prophets? Well, the majority left themselves some wiggle room here; sure, John the Baptist was murdered by King Herod, but Elijah ascended to Heaven, and Jeremiah's ending was an unknown certainty. While Elijah personified the message of hope for the restoration of Israel; Jeremiah was the prophet who loved and desired the best for the Israelites, should they only obey God; and John the Waymaker personified the humility and simplicity of faith by preparing Judea for the Lamb of God, through repentance.

As close as the collective majority seemed to be in calling Jesus a prophet, they were all equally far off, because they could only see Jesus as a human, but not as the God in the flesh. Even today, the majority of people include Jesus in the same category as Confucius (Chinese Philosopher), Siddhartha Gautama (founder of Buddhism), and Muhammad (founder of Islam).

Speaking to the apparent spokesperson of the Apostles, *"He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Kephas said in reply, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to him in reply, "Blessed you are, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Kephas, and upon this kephas I will build my Church and the gates of the netherworld will not prevail against it."*<sup>6</sup>

So what does all of this have to do with those who have already accepted Christ Jesus as their Lord and God? We must all remain perpetually on guard from putting Jesus into one of our comfortable little boxes. I know many Christians who only know 'loveable, cuddly, and cute Jesus', but when the suffering comes, they say, 'Baby Jesus, how could you have let this happen to me?' Then there are other Christians who only know Chief Financial Officer Jesus who wants them to be rich, with an enormity of material things, but when the suffering comes they say, 'Jesus how am I suppose to live a humble and simple life?' Then there is a clear disconnect between the Jesus, who walked the earth, with the Jesus who some of you believe in. How is it that the Christ has all authority over all things - that He can heal the sick, multiply loaves and

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<sup>6</sup> Mt. 16:13-20; Cf. Isa. 22:15-24; Lk. 11:52.

fish, and calm storms, but the sick and the poor among you do not pray to be healed, do not think that the Lord will provide for you, or will cause hurricanes and tornadoes to dissipate?

***“Now they know that everything you gave me is from you, because the words you gave to me I have given to them, and they accepted them and truly understood that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me.”*** So, you see now - it is by and through the word, which is Love, that we come to know Jesus. That is to say, that in the beginning was Holy Love and the Love was with God, and the Love was God, and the Love became flesh and made His dwelling among us, and we saw His glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. The Love that the Father gave Him, He also gave us, and through grace we accepted that Love and then understood that the Love came from the Father, and we believed that the Father sent us His Love. *“This is what you shall tell the Israelites: Holy Love sent me to you.”* Moses, a type of Christ, was only a passing sign of the Love, which God would one day send to permanently Save His people from the slavery of sin. The Love that came is Christ Jesus, the beloved and only begotten Son of God the Father.

***“I do not pray for the world but for the ones you have given me.”*** Jesus does not pray to immediately reconcile the whole world to Himself, but, rather, He prays for those of His who are in the world to *Cooperate with Him*, so that *together* they can bring the world into union with the Father through the aid of the Holy Spirit who works in them.

Therefore, the first step in knowing the Father through the Son's election is in seeing the Father *through* the Son who He sent in the name of Love.

*“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”* (John 14:9)

## A SHORT TREATMENT ON THE TWO TYPES OF WISDOM

***“and they accepted them and truly understood . . .”*** How is it that we 'truly' understand anything? How can the finite ever truly comprehend the infinite? Jesus answered these question by saying:

*“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you. . . . The*

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through the Son's Election'*

*Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name - He will teach you everything and remind you of all that [I] told you."*<sup>7</sup>

One reason why many of us cannot accept the Holy Spirit is because wounded dirt is cursed from knowing anything beyond its five human senses, and secondly because the Holy Spirit needs our faith to function within us. In other words, the Holy Spirit is driven to please God, but "*It is impossible to please God without faith.*"<sup>8</sup> Faith is the language of paradox and the paradox is the language of Christ Jesus. *Paradoxes* do not cancel each other out; rather, they challenge us to believe outside of reason alone.

Fear is the opposite of faith, and fear of the paradox is the reason why many non-Catholic Christians cannot believe in the Real Presence of the Lord in the Holy Eucharist. Indeed, they share in the same lack of faith as some of the Jews in Jesus' time who said, "*How can this man give us [His] flesh to eat?*"<sup>9</sup> I am not saying that a person who is in protest against the Catholic Church cannot know Jesus, but only that Christ Jesus can and should be known through faith in the Catholic Sacrament of the Eucharist, and this truth sacred Scripture confirms, "*And it happened that, while He was with them at table, He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, but He vanished from their sight.*"<sup>10</sup> "I am the living Bread that came down from Heaven; whoever eats this Bread will live forever; and the Bread that I will give is my Flesh for the life of the world."<sup>11</sup>

"Then they returned from the tomb and announced all these things to the eleven and to all the others. The women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James; the others who accompanied them also told this to the Apostles, but their story seemed like nonsense and they did not believe them. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb, bent down, and saw the burial cloths alone; then he went home amazed at what had happened."<sup>12</sup> Even the resurrection of Jesus does not make sense to us without faith. St. Peter had to run to the empty tomb to confirm with his human senses what he obviously

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<sup>7</sup> Jn. 14:15-17, 26.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Heb. 11:6.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Jn. 6:52.

<sup>10</sup> Lk. 24:30-31.

<sup>11</sup> Jn 6:51

<sup>12</sup> Lk. 24:9-12.

wanted to believe by faith, or else he would not have visited the tomb at all. Peter had come face to face with the paradoxical challenge of faith and wrestled with God. St. Paul wrote about how difficult it is grapple with faith in Christ Jesus through reason alone in this way:

*"The message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written; "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the learning of the learned I will set aside." Where is the wise one? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made the wisdom of the world foolish? For since in the wisdom of God the world did not come to know God through the wisdom, it was the will of God through foolishness of the proclamation to save those who have faith. For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength."*<sup>13</sup>

This is the language of the paradox that those who are *In Christ* are called to 'truly' discern. Through faith, the Holy Spirit teaches us that what is real - is actually not real, and what is not real - is indeed real. How else could we 'truly' understand such ridiculous sounding notions as dying to ourselves, being born again, taking up the Cross, forgiving all injury, loving enemies, leaving all behind to follow Christ; to being blessed in poverty, mourning, humility, and peacemaking?

The language of Christ is only paradoxical because the world teaches the opposite of what He does. The reason why the message of the Christ is rejected by so many is because it is potentially life transforming. It forces us to throw everything away - everything that we previously knew to be true and to become children again; to learn the real truth from He who is Truth.

By the time I was 31, I had invested nearly one hundred thousand dollars in an undergraduate and graduate education, had written two books, was a well known speaker and fully entrenched into what I knew to be true. Then the suffering came and I learned that almost everything that I had previously knew to be true, now seemed to be lies. The truth

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<sup>13</sup> 1 Cor. 1:18-25.

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is that the message of the Cross destroys the mask of the false-self (the pretense of self) and leaves us cold, naked, and broken on the threshing floor of God. I was there, so I know what I tell you is real.

The stark contrast between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world is clear, but because there are some Christians who respond to the grace of God and others reject it at times, there remains to be contrasting types of wisdom, even within the community.

There is one type of wisdom that only knows to seek out Christ when she finds herself in a foxhole, but there is a second and more perfect type of wisdom that gives her to know that she has *always* been in a foxhole. One type of wisdom *worships* Christ Jesus and, by this, she is always ready to give lip service and the litany of 'thank you Jesus, praise the Lord, alleluia', but there is a second and more perfect type of wisdom that has responded to the call to *follow* Jesus, or as St. Gregory of Nazianzen said, "It is a great thing to speak of God, but still better to purify oneself for God."<sup>14</sup> There is one type of wisdom that knows what it is like to have plenty and a second type that knows what it is like to want, but there is a third and more perfect type of wisdom that knows the difference between both. That is, I was blessed to know what it is like to be able to buy anything that I wanted, but the greater blessing came when wisdom taught me to pray for things that I needed.

Therefore, the second step in knowing the Father through the Son's election is to accept the tutelage of the Holy Spirit - the Wisdom of God. Much more will be said about this process of coming to know the Father and the Son through discernment in Chapter Fifteen of *Cooperating with God: Life with the Cross*.

*"For Wisdom is mobile beyond all motion, and she penetrates and pervades all things by reason of her purity. For she is an aura of the might of God, and a pure effusion of the glory of the Almighty; therefore nought that is sullied enters into her. For she is the refulgence of eternal light, the spotless mirror of the power of God, the image of His goodness. And she, who is one, can do all things, and renews everything while herself perduring; And passing into holy souls from age to age, she produces friends of God and prophets."*

(Wisdom 7:24-27)

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<sup>14</sup> *The Philokalia*.



## ABOUT A MAN WHO TRIED TO KNOW THE FATHER, WITHOUT FIRST KNOWING THE SON

I have a short story about a man I knew. This man sought to have a knowledge and relationship with God, but sought it without faith. Through the preponderance of facts, tangible evidence, and reason alone, this man could not understand the message of the Cross, let alone accept its paradoxes. Therefore, everything he sought and sowed was sought and sowed in vain, because there was no good grace in whatever he sought or wherever he sowed, and because there was no good grace, this man fell onto the path of destruction.

I do not know if this man of whom I speak was about to perish into eternal damnation, but I do know that he had many Christians friends who cared about him, so when the suffering came, they all stormed Heaven with their prayers and the man died and was born again. I was a witness to this miracle, so believe what I tell you is true. This man was the drum major for the marching band that plays on the wide road to Hell, but through prayer, repentance, and the grace of God, Satan lost a drummer and Heaven gained a trumpeter.

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, on your own intelligence rely not; In all your ways be mindful of Him, and He will make straight your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5-6)*

## THAT KNOWING CHRIST MEANS BEING IN CHRIST

*“Now they know . . .”* To know is to have intimately experienced. In similar fashion as to how I came to know the false joy of sin, or the delights of chocolaty deserts, or the emotional highs of victory in sports - is also the way to know God the Father through Christ Jesus. We must taste (experience) and see (confirm - i.e. Simon Peter running to the tomb) that the Lord is good.<sup>15</sup> As often as this notion of intimacy is said, please do not take it lightly. Have you meditated on the words of the Lord when He says, ‘Eat my Body, and drink my Blood’? How much more loudly and clearly could we have been called to intimately take part in relationship with Him? I cannot teach you how to know Jesus or put you on the path to true intimacy with him, but I can briefly describe to

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ps. 34.8.

you the road that I found, so that a similar road will be your lot as well. Though, I must say, if you are reading this book, then I believe that you are already on the road. In that case, confirmation or encouragement is what I have to offer you.

In Chapter One, I described this call 'to know' in relation to the cursing of the fig tree, the cleansing of the temple, and the death of the same fig tree. Now I would like to more broadly describe the call to intimately know Jesus through the Cross in terms of the Passion of Christ. I wish that this concept could be grasped through such polite phrases as, 'We must lose our life to find it'<sup>16</sup> or that 'no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born from above',<sup>17</sup> or 'take up your Cross and follow me',<sup>18</sup> but it is not that simple, for we would rather murder Jesus than allow ourselves to be transformed by His message - yet, that is exactly the path to true victory. We are Saved through the Passion of Christ; that is, we are Saved not by what He *did*, but, rather, by what He *allowed* to be done to Him. Therefore, we too must be little servants in this world.

St. Faustina wrote about the difficulty of following the Passion of Christ Jesus in entry number 446 of her Diary:

"Then I saw the Lord Jesus nailed to the Cross. When He had hung on it for a while, I saw a multitude of souls crucified like Him. Then I saw a second multitude of souls, and a third. The second multitude were not nailed to [their] crosses, but were holding them firmly in their hands. The third were neither nailed to [their] crosses nor holding them firmly in their hands, but were dragging [their] Cross behind them and were discontent. Jesus said to me, **"Do you see these souls? Those who are like Me in the pain and contempt they suffer, will be like Me also in glory. And those who resemble Me less in pain and contempt will also bear less resemblance to Me in glory."**

To intimately know the Father through the Son, we too must be born of a woman, leave home to begin our journey to find self, discover truth, and be rejected, suffer, die, and be resurrected. It is true what St. Paul

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Mt. 10:39, Mt. 16:25.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Jn. 3:3.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Mt. 16:24.

has written - that those who are *In Christ* have become new creations,<sup>19</sup> but that is not to say that we are perfect. For most, perfection (being made whole, complete, holy, catholic) will only occur *after* the temporal death and resurrection, but it is the spiritual death and resurrection that puts us onto the path to glory. In other words, through the Sacrament of Baptism, we are reborn from above, but later there will be a more perfect rebirth from above through resurrection. Even our Lord, who was called the beloved Son by God the Father at His Baptism in the Jordan,<sup>20</sup> spoke of a second and more perfect Baptism through death,<sup>21</sup> and from above did the Father raise Him up.<sup>22</sup>

If I could be even more precise, I would say that to intimately know Christ through the Holy Spirit is a lifelong process of prayer and allowing Him to destroy everything within us that could be an obstacle to perfect union. To *truly* know Christ Jesus, and therefore the Father through Him, is the only way that the will of God for the world can also become our will. The will of God for the world has been remembered in this prayer. Therefore, the final step in knowing the Father through the Son's election is to completely sacrifice our self-will, so that we can lovingly accept and have our heart conformed to the common will of the Holy Trinity for our life.

I know that accepting our childhood is a very difficult reversal of fortune for us adults, but we cannot know the Fatherhood of God without first acknowledging and embracing our own spiritual childhood. Indeed, this new reality may cause the suffering of temporal loss, but I plead with you that you do not let shortsightedness, a desire to be instantaneously gratified through temporal gain, or superficiality steal your eternal reward! Inasmuch as we are called to share Jesus with our neighbor, it is impossible to share with others what we do not have ourselves.

*“For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, Himself human, who gave Himself as ransom for all.” (1 Timothy 2:5-6)*

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Mt. 3:17.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Mt. 20:22-23;

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Rom. 6:4; Gal. 1:1.

# ~ Chapter Six ~

## *The Fourth Petition*

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### **‘FOR PROTECTION IN THE NAME (AUTHORITY) OF JESUS’**

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#### **The Gospel of John Chapter 17:11-12**

And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are. When I was with them I protected them in your name that you gave me, and I guarded them, and none of them was lost except the son of destruction, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

**I**n my life before Christ, if a woman approached me and asked me if I had any *protection*, I would have thought that she was asking me if I had a condom on my person. In contrast, if a man had approached and asked me that same question, I would have thought that he was asking me if I had a firearm on my person. To each of these questions I would have usually been able to answer 'yes'.

How radically has my life changed through the love of Christ? Whereas before, *protection* meant 'destruction of life', now, *protection* means being 'fully alive'.

### A SHORT TREATMENT ON THE CIRCLE OF GRACE & THE POINT AT THE CENTER OF THE CIRCLE

*"and none of them was lost except the son of destruction . . ."* It is the good and pleasing will of God that everyone be Saved and come to the knowledge of truth.<sup>1</sup> It is equally true to say that God, in His perfect wisdom, has given each man and woman the freedom and responsibility to choose life *In Him* or death *Outside* of Him. Inasmuch as those who die *In Christ* will live eternally in joy for having chosen the truth, while in the flesh, those who die *Outside* of Christ will eternally endure the greatest torment; that is, having truth revealed to them, desiring it, and not ever being able to dwell in it. Whereas, the former group will have lovingly *Cooperated with God* and the latter did not, with both groups the will of God will be accomplished. In the end, both groups (the glorified and the damned) will come to know the truth and will know it for eternity.

Figuratively speaking, if I were to visually describe the *Circle of Grace* it would be like saying that our Father took a compass and drew a perfect circle and, within this circle, He filled it with an overabundance of His grace and protection in the name of His only-begotten and beloved Son. It would also be to say, that *Outside* of this perfect circle, God allowed there to be only death, destruction, and division. Therefore, the difference between self-perseverance and self-destruction is this - are you within or without the grace of God?

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. 1 Tim 2:4.

Let us not be so quick to point the accusatory finger at Judas Iscariot here, because while it is true that he did betray the Lord and later took his own life (which is a rejection of grace and a mortal sin), it is also true that the text here does not name the historical person Judas Iscariot as *the son of destruction*.

So much has already been said in the previous reflections about love, cooperation, grace, and being *In Christ* that I dare be very brief here in saying that to be within the *Circle of Grace* is to be the adopted son of the Creator, and to be without the Circle is to be the adopted son of the Destroyer. Just as Scripture was fulfilled through the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, it will be fulfilled again when those who walk along his path are thrown into the pool of fire.<sup>2</sup> The most foolhardy and prideful choice that any person or nation could make for themselves is to reject the free protection that our Father God desires for each of us to share in, through the name (love) of His Son.

I remember a time in my own life when I had rejected the love of Christ Jesus, but, ironically, had made sure that my temporal home was insured against fires, floods, and tornados; that my cars were fully covered and even my own life had two substantial insurance policies against it. Now, in Christ-centered retrospect, I can see how those decisions were terribly flawed in regards to spiritual matters, but to my perishing soul those choices made perfect sense to me back then.

The perishing will always surrender the blessings and protection of God for Judas' thirty pieces of silver. They will surrender eternal happiness for worldly gain and the second death. The perishing will always prefer to serve Mammon rather than God. Therefore, I plead with the living now that you seek the point within the center of the *Circle of Grace* and cling to it with all the strength that you can enjoy through prayer, sacrifice, and obedience.

*"It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the Heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in."*

(Isaiah 40:22, KJV)

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Rev. 20:15.

## A STORY ABOUT A MAN & HIS NAME

Once there was an older man who happened to be the only child of his parents, which meant that he was the only bearer of his family name. It was important to the older man that his family name would continue throughout the ages, so he and his wife first brought three daughters into the world and finally a son to whom he gave the name *Christ-bearer*, so to speak. To double his odds at an extended legacy, the older man convinced his youngest daughter who was with boy child to give her son the same family name that they shared. Knowing how important this matter was to her father, the young woman acquiesced.

So the boy child was born out of wedlock and was given the name *Prince*, so to speak, and, with his uncle, went forth into the world with the understanding of their awesome responsibility to perpetuate the family name. The son of the older man went on to have two daughters, one of whom he gave the name *Christian*, and the older man's grandson, likewise, had three daughters, all of which he gave his names to match the initials of his name, but unless one of these five women bear a child and give it the family name - it will die. Now, wherever the soul of the older man is, surely this matter is no longer a concern of his.

The Son of God came into the world with His Father's name and did not have any children of His own to carry forth His name, yet, for two millennium, there has been no greater name on Earth than the name of Christ Jesus.

Through vanity and superficiality, many men have come to have a proud love affair with their own name - a name that has no power to raise the dead, heal the sick, or move even the smallest of mountains. Therefore, whatever nominal value the family name may have for the men of whom I spoke, pray that they will come to rejoice in the fact that while their family name may die, the name of the Lord God will go forth into eternity. Pray as well that all three men receive that white stone, with a new name written thereon.<sup>3</sup>

*"Why are dust and ashes proud? Even during life man's body decays."*  
(Sirach 10:9)

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<sup>3</sup> Rev. 2:17.

## HOW TWO WORLDS BECAME UNITED THROUGH ONE NAME

There are three things that cross over from the invisible world into our visible realm, those being: our soul, love, and hate. There are three things that cross over from our visible world into the invisible, those being: our soul, love, and hate. The veil between these two worlds of God has not always been so static.

Even though the proper word for 'authority' is *exousia* in the New Testament, let us remember that Jesus came with the full authority of His Father by virtue of Him coming in His Father's name (Gk. *onama*).<sup>4</sup> Only in this name does he have the authority to perform works and miracles.<sup>5</sup> In this name, he has the authority to answer prayers.<sup>6</sup> In This name, he has the authority to grant eternal life to those who believe in the name given to Him by His Father.<sup>7</sup> In addition, in this name, others have the authority to cast out demons in His name,<sup>8</sup> and to this name, every knee shall bow.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, there is a divine integration with the name of Jesus and the authority given to Him by His Father. That is, Jesus' authority is rooted in His name. Therefore, let us disregard any previous notion that *name* here and throughout the New Testament is some sort of calling noun, such as 'they call me by the name of Brock'. Rather, let us temporarily replace (for our immediate purposes here) nearly every mention of *name* in Scripture with the word *authority*. For example, "Baptizing them in the authority of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,"<sup>10</sup> "If you ask anything of me in my authority, I will do it,"<sup>11</sup> "Holy Father keep them in your authority, that you have given me."

Before we proceed any further, in regards to the aforementioned Scriptures, let us call to memory what we have already discussed in the previous reflections: (1) That the Primacy of Jesus is based upon the *authority* that God the Father has bestowed upon Him in Love. In other words, the foundation of the Primacy of Jesus is based upon Love, so,

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jn. 5:43;

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Jn. 10:25.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Jn. 14:13-14.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Jn. 20:31.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Mt. 7:22.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Phil. 2:10.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Mt. 28:19.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Jn. 14:14.



likewise, the *authority* of Jesus is Love; (2) That the meaning of the name of God is Holy Love, and Jesus was sent in the *name* (authority/Love) of His Father; and (3) That the name Jesus (Yeshua) means 'God Saves', and the reason why God saves His people is because He Loves them.

Now having ever so briefly recalled the previous reflections, let us rephrase those three sample Scriptures and read them again in their true spiritual and mystical meaning; *"Baptize them in Love;" "If you ask for anything in my Love, then in my Love will it be done;" "Holy Father, keep them in the Love, that you have given me."* What a happy chance it was for us to be able to approach the throne of grace in this fashion.

I have twice already treated humanities' 'Original Sin', with the latter being in greater detail than the first, but here I must briefly treat it again. Although most people call the sin of Adam and Eve the 'Original Sin', I find it to be more proper to place the word 'humanities' before it - for there was an even more 'Original Sin' than that of our first parents. The sin of which I speak took place in the invisible realm, and, as a consequence of it, a number of angels and their leader fell.

I also discussed in Chapter One how man can do nothing but respond to the grace (Love) of God, because God Loved first, and, as a result, humanity is perpetually forced to use their God-given freewill to either accept or reject His grace (Love). In turn, Satan sinned (hated) first and, because of that, humanity must respond to that which moved before it; that is, we must either accept or reject sin (hate).

In consequence of our first parents having failed the test, the veil was dropped, and neither they nor their descendants could eat of the Tree of Life in their wounded state, as Scripture says, *"When He expelled the man, He settled him east of the garden of Eden, and He stationed the cherubim and the fiery revolving sword, to guard the way to the tree of life"*<sup>12</sup> But when sin and death were destroyed through the Passion of Christ, the veil was torn open, and, as a result, those who are *In Christ* can now approach the throne of God through the Love of His Son and eat of the Tree of Life, which is the Body and Blood of Christ Jesus. *"And behold, the veil of the Sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth quaked, rocks were split."*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Gen. 3:24.

<sup>13</sup> Mt. 27:51; Cf. Eph. 2:13-16.

This is why the *name* of Jesus has proven to be a stumbling block for every other religion. Our Holy Father gave the world only one *name* (authority/Love) by which the sick could be healed, the lame could walk, and the blind could see. In the name of Muhammad the dead will not rise, and in the name of Buddha nothing can be done, but through the *name* of Jesus all things are possible. Outside of Love there is only hate.

Therefore, to *Cooperate with God* in this Petition, we must persevere in staying nearer the Cross, which is the point in the center of the *Circle of Grace*, which is the Tree of Life in the middle of the Garden. The closer to the point that we are the more *In Christ* we will be and the greater that our blessings may be, in consequence of the protection in His *name*. In addition, the nearer the Cross we are the greater that we will be able to call upon His Love to protect, heal, and strengthen our Sisters and Brothers. It will prove true for us that, *"The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful."*<sup>14</sup>

*"Because of this, God greatly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the love that is above every love, that at the love of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in Heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2:9-11)

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Jas. 5:16.

# ~ *Chapter Seven* ~

## *The Fifth Petition*

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### **‘TO HAVE JOY IN CHRIST JESUS’**

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#### **The Gospel of John Chapter 17:13**

But now I am coming to you. I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely.

According to Satan, joy can be found in this world through the accumulation of things - things that we cannot take with us to Heaven nor Hell.

Indeed, it is easy for us to experience a form of sensual pleasure through the acquisition of temporal goods, but this type of joy can never last, nor was it ever meant to last. True joy is found in possessing nothing - "*Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the Kingdom of God.*"<sup>1</sup>

My daughters are so different than I was as a child. It always took a great deal of pomp to impress me, but it is the smallest of things that causes a smile to dance on their faces. I believe that the great pearl of simple living is best found in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, where Christ Jesus, our true fountain of joy, comes to us in just a small bite of bread and a sip of wine. Under the guise of that small morsel of bread and drop of wine are contained the real Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of God. How simultaneously amazing, awesome, and simple is that?

Whereas the world teaches that joy is hard to find, the Catholic Church teaches that all one needs to do to find true joy in this life is to participate in the Sacrifice of the Mass.

## REVISITING THE SUBSTANCE OF GOD & THE SUBSTANCE OF MAN

*“ . . . so that they may share my joy completely.”* The Yahwist understanding is that, from the very beginning, man was created by God to be His vessel on earth, and this is evidenced by the fact that he was made out of *adama* (clay/ground/dirt).<sup>2</sup> This vessel (called the flesh/mind/body) became a *living* vessel when God (lovingly and voluntarily) blew the breath of life (man's eternal soul) into his nostrils. The soul is good because it comes from God, but because of 'the Fall', it now needs to be in union with the Holy Spirit to be able to always do what it was created to do; that is, the will of God. Whereas in the Old Covenant, the Spirit (Heb. *Ruach*) of God could be upon man,<sup>3</sup> now, in

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<sup>1</sup> Mt. 5:3.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Gen. 2:7. The Hebrew word *neshaman* (Cf. Gen. 2:7) has the same meaning as *Ruach* (breath/life/spirit/soul).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Jgs. 3:10.

the New Covenant, the promise is that the Spirit of God will dwell in man.<sup>4</sup>

Most fruit trees do not produce good fruit until after they have become mature. As a result of humanities' 'Original Sin', the harmonic state of man's mind, body, and soul were wounded and became a cacophonous community. In this disconnected state, man's three parts are at war with one another. Because his soul cannot find rest in the body, it uncomfortably endures in its chaotic community where many of the appetites and passions of the flesh are disordered. Because he does not know God, he is consequently unable to always choose good (God) over evil (Satan).

Now when I say that our mind, body, and soul are in a 'disconnected state', I don't mean to say that the human vessel is composed of a mind, a body, and a soul. On the contrary, the human is mind, body, and soul. And only after the vessel has been cleansed through Baptism, filled with the water of the Holy Spirit, and begins to become one with the perfect flesh of Christ (through the Sacrament of the Eucharist) can it start to produce the wine (fruit) that it (the ground/*adama*) was created to do. In other words, it is the indwelling of Christ Jesus that heals our disconnected state and makes us truly whole.

Before we continue, allow me to write more precisely about the dichotomy of the dirt. The human vessel is first called *actual dirt*, meaning that, in consequence of the curse, it comes forth from the womb of woman as wounded dirt.<sup>5</sup> From this point, the human soul (our substance) will proceed to take on the image (substance) and likeness (nature) of what it is most influenced by. That is, if freewill leads us down the path of sin and hate, then the soul, in turn, will take on the image (impurity) and likeness (fear) of the evil spirit. In contrast, if freewill responds properly to grace and it is born again from above, then the soul, being influenced by the Holy Spirit, will assume the Holy Spirit's qualities.<sup>6</sup> The flesh then responds to the inner workings of the

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jn. 15:23.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Gen 3:17-19. The cursed ground represents the natural dirt and all of the things that it has/will produce and also feasts off it (i.e. man and woman/plants and animals); that is, because of humanities' 'Original Sin', the natural constitution/inclination of man and his environs is cursed - out of original order.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 24:14; Mt. 10:24-25.

soul's acceptance or rejection of God's grace and moves from being *wounded dirt* to being either *corrupt dirt* or *incorrupt dirt*. The reason for the latter shift is because the substance of our soul is no longer beholden to (or is subject to) sin, but, rather, now belongs to the image (holy) and likeness (love) of the Holy Trinity. Therefore, the distinction of dirt rest in these two classes alone.

Perhaps it sounds ridiculous that the condition of the soul can affect the condition of the flesh, but it is nonetheless true. When the flesh comes in contact with the Holy, it will either become more Holy itself or wither and die. For example, when the well-intended Uriah touched the Holy Ark (in disobedience) he died on the spot, but when Moses came down from the mountain his flesh emitted a glow. Whereas both men, Moses and Uriah, were affected from the outside by Holy, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we too are changed from the inside out. This is the type of personal transubstantiation that I wrote about in Chapter One.

The possibility of a perfect consubstantial mind, body, and soul is possible and God wills for it be so. *"Having become perfect in a short while, he reached the fullness of a long career; for his soul was pleasing to the Lord, therefore He sped him out of the midst of wickedness."*<sup>7</sup> *"So be perfect, just as your Heavenly Father is perfect."*<sup>8</sup>

Paragraph No. 2015 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church states the expectation of our perfection in this way:

"The way of perfection passes by the way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle.<sup>9</sup> Spiritual progress entails the asceticism and mortification that gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes."

"He who climbs never stops going from beginning to beginning, through beginnings that have no end. He never stops desiring what he already knows."<sup>10</sup>

The revelation of the Trinity is that the union of the energy, nature, and substance of God is also possible within us, through God's help. The

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<sup>7</sup> Sir. 4:13-14.

<sup>8</sup> Mt. 5:48.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. 2 Tim. 4.

<sup>10</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, Hom. in Cant. 8: PG 44, 941C.

transubstantiated flesh of many saints of the Catholic Church, which remained remarkably preserved, even after hundreds of years after their death, fully attest to the power of God and to the result of walking along that particular path in life that leads to true joy.

*"If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in His love. I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete. This is my commandment; love one another as I love you."*<sup>11</sup> On the night He was to be given up to death, a death which He freely accepted, here was the Lord telling His disciples what the true meaning of joy is. Shortly beforehand, He had given those gathered with Him a Trinitarian formula and also informed them how they fit in relation to the Godhead. In this formulation, Jesus calls His Father the vine grower, Himself the vine, and His disciples the branches of the vine. Perhaps you may have absently forgotten our previous reflections and now ask the question, 'Where is the Holy Spirit in the discourse of the Vine?'

I have a parable to tell you about a vine grower who, for reasons known to Him, greatly loved the dirt. For many years the vine grower did nothing but spend arduous amounts of time cultivating and nurturing His precious dirt; thus preparing it for His one special, imperishable, and unique seed that He also loved beyond measure. In fact, this was the vine grower's *only* seed.

Everyday, the dirt would cry out, *"Master, give us the seed! Give us the seed! We are ready for the seed! We need the seed!"* but the vine grower, being a very patient spirit, resisted the impatient importuning of the dirt, in favor of His own perfect timing. Then that long awaited day came, when the vine grower planted His most beloved seed amongst the dirt, baptized it with water, and some of the dirt rejoiced in unison, *"Blessed be the vine grower who has trusted us with His only seed!"* But some of the other dirt was incredulous enough to revolt in saying, *"You cultivated us all these long years and this is what you have to give us? This seed looks just like us! There is nothing special about it at all! Surely you can send us something greater!"*

So the dejected community of dirt plotted to destroy the one seed of the vine grower, with seemingly a modicum of success (given that the seed did die due to their machinations), and the ungrateful dirt felt

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<sup>11</sup> Jn. 15:10-12.

vindicated in singing, “Now the vine grower will send us the special seed - the one that He has truly prepared for us from the beginning.” I tell you the truth, this community of dirt is still waiting, to this day, for the true seed of the vine grower. The dirt, which first rejoiced, was now sad that they had lost their long-awaited seed, but what they did not know, and what could not have been known to them, because they never had a seed grow amongst them, was that a seed must die before it can grow into a vine.

I need not go any further into this parable, as you should know well how it ends, and if you remember our reflection on the substance of man, then you have been blessed with another understanding. It only remains for me to tell you one more truth. That is, the branches of the vine bear fruit and the dirt is made pure, only because they both share in that same Holy substance that proceeds from the vine grower and the vine; and the substance, of which I speak, is called the *True Water*. Without water, the branches cannot and will not bear fruit, just as we cannot bear true fruit without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Water, being the age old symbolic reference of the Holy Spirit, is essential to the soul.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, to share in the joy of Christ completely is to share in His very substance, which is Love. We share in the nature of Holy Love when we receive the Holy Spirit through the Sacrament of water Baptism or at whatever appointed time that God might find to be perfect for His indwelling. I end the discourse on the Holy Spirit here, as this subject will be more aptly applied in the latter Petitions.

*“You will show me the path to life, abounding joy in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever.” (Psalm 16:11)*

## ON CHRIST BEING THE ONLY SOURCE OF COMPLETE JOY FOR DIRT

As was written in the parable above, “Everyday, the dirt would cry out, “Master, give us the seed! Give us the seed! We are ready for the seed! We need the seed!” If you recall our previous reflections, the seed is what became the Tree of Life, and the reason why our first parents could not eat of the Tree is because what had become wounded could not be made eternally wounded. God desired more for His creatures than for them to remain

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. CCC 694.



eternally dysfunctional and far from Him. This is the reason why the dirt cries out, because it knows very well that it is nothing but dirt, and although it knows that it belongs to God, it also knows that *Outside of God* (without the seed planted within) that it is not even a true child of God, but, rather, just a bastard that is not even eligible to receive the inheritance, as sacred Scripture says.<sup>13</sup>

It is true that we suppress that God sized hole within our soul that begs to be filled with what is All good and pleasing for it (the seed). As *wounded dirt*, we effort greatly to fill this craving and hole up with temporal goods, flawed love affairs with other humans, and even pet animals. We leech upon whatever society has to offer up that allows us to feel false joy; such as movies, food, titles, degrees, trophies, the rush of the illicit and illegal, clothes, drugs, or whatever may be the new craze. Esau went on to sell his entire inheritance for just one bowl of soup to fill that craving.<sup>14</sup> Now please do not think of yourself as the Tax Collector and Esau as the Pharisee here.<sup>15</sup> For, I tell you the truth, Esau felt that he was starving and needed food, but many of you have risked your eternal inheritance for a great deal less than a pot of red stew, and so have I.

After Cain had killed his brother Abel, God said, "*What have you done! Listen: Your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil.*"<sup>16</sup> The life blood of Abel cried up to God from the soil, that is to say, that the soul of Abel (dirt) cried out on the behalf of all dirt (all of humanity). Here the dirt had not only realized that it had condemned itself even further than it already was, but also that it is capable of even worse. God punished Cain by not allowing him to produce fruit from the dirt. The fate of Cain was the equivalent to being in the temporal Hell; that is, never being able to please God and the flesh being in eternal disharmony with the soul. Because Cain had been turned completely over to his flesh, there was nothing that he could do that God would judge to be good. The punishment of Cain was the same reprobate punishment that

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Heb. 12:8.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Gen 25:19-34.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Lk. 18:9-14.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Gen. 4:10.

St. Paul wrote about in his first letter to the Church of Corinth, for those who snubbed God for sake of their own desires.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the dirt cries out for a savior and the dirt cries out when the flesh sins, but sacred Scripture tells us that when the Blood of Christ Jesus fell onto the dirt from the Cross at Calvary it spoke more eloquently than that of Abel's.<sup>18</sup> ". . ., for the blood of Abel asked for the death of Cain the fratricide, while the blood of the Lord has asked for, and obtained, life for His persecutors."<sup>19</sup> That is to say, that the blood (life) of Abel further condemned the dirt (soul), but the Blood of the Lord rescued it. In other words, when the blood of Abel fell into the dirt, the dirt cried and mourned, but when the Blood of the Lamb of God fell onto the same dirt, the dirt rejoiced, because it now had the seed of the Master and no longer had to be subject to its wounding curse.

Therefore, there are two lives that we can follow; the first life leads to condemnation, which is the life of Cain - a life of sin and unrepentance. The second life leads to eternal life in Heaven, which is the *Life with the Cross* - a life of true joy. Even though these two lives are as drastically different as the wide and narrow roads, they both inhibit a degree of suffering. The suffering in the life of Cain is one of restlessness, as he even said himself, "*Lord, my punishment is too great to bear. Since you have now banished me from the soil, and I must avoid your presence and become a restless wanderer on the earth . . .*"<sup>20</sup> There are Twelve Fruits of the Holy Spirit that a person *Outside of God* will never simultaneously bear, and they are: Charity, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Generosity, Gentleness, Faithfulness, Modesty, Self-control, and Chastity.<sup>21</sup> I do not care if you swear that you know a good Atheist, because I guarantee you that when their suffering comes; that is, when their will is not working as they ought, their mask will fall off and crack on the ground and the foul stench of their deeply cacophonous state will come out as hard and fast as a world-class race horse comes out of the gate. A soul that is *Outside of God* will forever be restless and will never have true joy. These pitiful

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 1:18-32.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Heb 12:24.

<sup>19</sup> *Moral Reflections of Job*, St. Gregory the Great.

<sup>20</sup> Gen 4:13-14.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Gal. 5:22-23

creatures would rather flee from the discipline of the Lord, rather than to suffer the loss of just an ounce of their will for the greater good of God.

On the contrary, the suffering that comes from living life in Christ Jesus is one of having true joy through the passion of self-sacrifice. In other words, if we truly desire to have love of self, then we must extend love to God and neighbor. Perfect love is triune in nature, and if we cooperate with the grace to love perfectly, then, we will have truly loved as Christ Jesus loves and share in the joy of the Lord. True joy cannot be possessed, neither can a selfish heart find it. The man who does not *Cooperate with God* and share his free gift of joy with others will lose it like the wicked and lazy servant who buried his one talent.<sup>22</sup> Did King Solomon selfishly possess his free gift of wisdom or did he share it with the community? Those who are *In Christ* will share like Christ shares.

The first letter attributed to St. Peter agrees with the conclusion of this Reflection, in saying that, "*The God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory through Christ [Jesus] will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you after you have suffered a little.*"<sup>23</sup> In other words, true and complete joy comes with a Cross on your back.

*"Sing praise to the Lord, you faithful; give thanks to God's Holy love. For divine anger last but a moment; divine favor last a lifetime. At dusk weeping comes for the night; but at dawn there is rejoicing."*

(Psalm 30:5-6)

## A SHORT TREATMENT ON WHY JESUS SPOKE THIS PETITION INTO THE WORLD

*"I speak this in the world . . ."* Jesus the Christ spoke this prayer in the visible world, because that is exactly where the dirt is. In other words, for the Christ (the balm) to have spoken this prayer in the invisible realm would have proved to be futile, because that is not where the wound needed to be healed. What He spoke in the visible world was truth, and not just through His spoken word, but also through the living word of truth in His example, His walk, His deeds, His actions, His relationships, and His miracles. Ultimately, the Lord speaks the Life, the Way, and the Truth, even today, to those who have ears to hear Him.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Mt. 25:14-30.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Tim 5:10.

Therefore, to persevere in the grace that God has apportioned for this Petition it can be summed up with these two axioms: (1) The Holy Trinity is the only source of complete joy; and (2) She or He who has something greater than complete joy, has something greater than the Holy Trinity.

*“See that you do not reject the one who speaks. For if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much more in our case if we turn away from the one who warns from Heaven.” (Hebrews 12:25)*

# ~ *Chapter Eight* ~

## *The Sixth Petition*

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### **‘TO PERSEVERE IN THIS WORLD’**

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#### **The Gospel of John Chapter 17:14-16**

I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world.

**I**n the year that I finished writing this book, there were over six billion humans living on earth. Of these six billion, over one billion were Catholics and another one billion were various forms of protesting Christians. One day I had pondered as to how many of these six billion humans go a whole day without anyone praying for them or how many go years without even praying for themselves or how many souls in Purgatory do not have anyone on earth praying for them?

I firmly believe that one of the main reasons why people do not persevere in this world and, ultimately, have to go on to suffer the torments of Hell is because *they* had failed to pray for themselves and *we* had failed to pray for them. We have to do better! We can do better! The more we pray to God the more vulnerable we make ourselves to Him, and the more vulnerable we are to God the more fully alive He becomes in us and we in Him.

## OVERVIEW OF THIS PETITION

*"I do not ask that you take them out of the world . . ."* The beloved and only begotten Son of God was born of woman and became man, and was both divine and human (without contradiction or confusion) at the same time. Now, when it is said that God came and dwelt in humanity, the literal meaning holds true, that the person Jesus of Nazareth was fully human and fully divine and was fully a part of the Jewish community. Although, a second literal meaning is true as well, that when God took on the flesh, at that point in time He dwelt *In* humanity. That is, His fully divine substance came and fully dwelt within human flesh, blood, and bones - incorrupt dirt. In other words, He actually put *on* man. These co-truths are both axioms and miracles (without contradiction or confusion) because of Holy Love who was sent to Save us.

For one to believe that God became one with humanity and literally walked in our shoes, so that He might show us the way, is a faithful response to grace. Yet, to comprehend what that truly means for our life is an even greater revealed truth. This is what was revealed to the saints; that God loves us so much that He took on *our* body, so that in response to His love we might love Him and burn with a desire to become one with *His* body.

Now, after this transubstantiation begins to occur within us, we are then on our way to being born completely from above as the Gospel says,<sup>1</sup> and those who are born from above are not of His created visible world any longer; meaning that our soul is no longer a part of that which was cursed and wounded, but is now a part of the Kingdom of God. This is what it means to be completely *In Christ* and not of the world. Please do not proceed any further if my brevity here has confused you in the least, but instead contemplate these two paradoxes: (1) Those who belong to the world can never persevere in the world; and (2) There is a tree in the center of the *Circle of Hate*, which endures to ensnare humans and never lets them go.

***"I do not ask that you take them out of this world but that you keep them from the evil one."*** Notice how the Lord has apportioned grace to be set aside for victory in His name, inasmuch as we pray, *"and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."*<sup>2</sup> Our prayer to God the Father is simply that He does not turn us over to Satan, but rather that, in His parental mercy, He would provide for us a way out or through. It was the Apostle St. Paul, who wrote, *"No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial He will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it."*<sup>3</sup> It is true that only through the grace of God can we persevere in this world.

To tap into the allotted grace of God, which propels us to persevere to the end, we must *Cooperate with God* in two areas, and that is: (1) To accept and to work within the vocation that we have been called to; and (2) To accept our condition of being clay and God as being the Potter. In regards to the second expectation of things to do while we are in the world, it was not only in the desert where Jesus was tempted and tested, but it was a seemingly regular occurrence throughout His entire life and ministry. Christ Jesus was even tempted on the Cross as He breathed His last breaths. *"Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us,"*<sup>4</sup> they taunted. This particular temptation must have sounded strikingly familiar to our

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jn 3.

<sup>2</sup> Mt. 6:13. The Greek verb for lead (*eisphero*) is better translated into English, *"do not allow us to enter temptation and do not let us yield to temptation."* Cf. CCC 2846.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 10:13.

<sup>4</sup> Lk. 23:39.

Lord, since it is similar to the one that He had heard from the Adversary himself, *"If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here . . ."*<sup>5</sup> Satan always wants us to disobey God's will.

If Christ Jesus (the Way, the Life, and the Truth) was tempted all of His life, then why do those who desire to be *In Christ* flee from the life of Christ? Why do they run from the test and flee from the trial? Why do they run from the Potter and hide from His wheel and water? Do they not know that grace has provided us the victory over every test and trial in this life? Do they not know that the Potter is as patient, loving, and magnanimous, as He is stern and exacting?

I have known many men and women who are angry with God because of the very fact that they were born and have to live this life. They sound like Job, *"Perish the day on which I was born, the night when they said, 'The child is a boy'"*<sup>6</sup> They mourn because of their beginning, cry out for their ending, and they hate every ounce of suffering that comes in between. They ask, 'Why Lord?', and the word of God says, *"A man with training gains wide knowledge; a man of experience speaks sense. One never put to the proof [[test/trial]] knows little, whereas with travel a man adds to his resourcefulness."*<sup>7</sup> Therefore, I ask, what possible good do we have to offer God if we do not run the race to victory?

The greatest joy that God's grace allows us to receive from the tests and trials is that through both failure and victory we can discover what is most important in life; discern how close we are to perfect and what we need to give up to draw closer to God. That is to say, that through suffering we can know with great certainty where we are in relation to the point in the center of the *Circle of Grace*.

*"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us."* (Hebrews 12:1)

## THE TRUTH & THE LIE - LOVE & HATE

*" . . . but that you keep them from the evil one."* Sin has commonly been considered to be 'any offense that we commit against God', but if

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<sup>5</sup> Lk. 4:9.

<sup>6</sup> Job. 3:3.

<sup>7</sup> Sir. 34:9-10.



we were to simplify the defect of our nature even further, it would be to call sin exactly what it is; *pure hatred* against God and against everything that God loves. Another way to think of sin is by defining it as being what happens when we abuse our God-given freewill.<sup>8</sup> In other words, sin is what breaks and/or hinders our relationship with God, and to attempt to disrupt the natural reunion of God and man is an abuse of our freewill. We sin against God, neighbor, and self, when we violate God's Cooperative covenants and when we war against His Promissory covenants. Satan, the Father of lies, gave life to hate and, until his time is up, humanity must choose between being in the Kingdom of God (Love/Truth) or the Kingdom of Satan (Lies).

Lies are what open the door to every sin that we commit. This is why it is so vitally important to know Jesus (the Truth) and through Him the Father, who is the anchor of All Truth. The lie, which is the fruit of the tree in the middle of the *Circle of Hate*, is a beguiling beast, even equally as spellbinding as the serpent who planted the tree, and who God called the most cunning of all the animals that He had made.<sup>9</sup> A lie is first

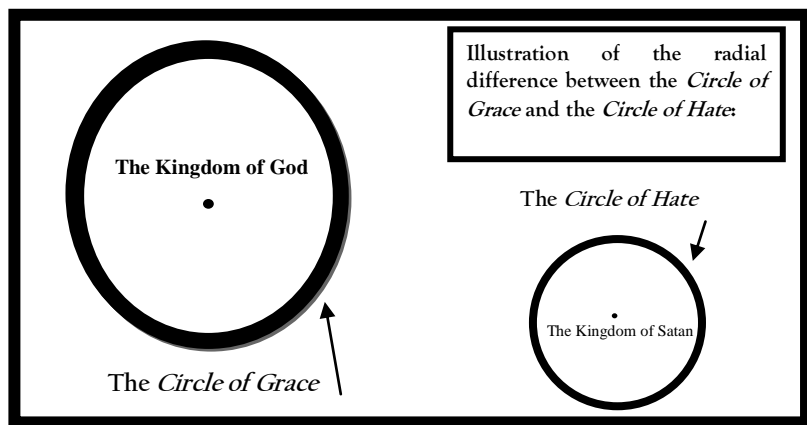
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<sup>8</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines *sin* as an abuse of the freedom that God has given created persons so that they are capable of loving him and loving another (CCC. 387). Sin is an offense against God as well as a fault against reasons, truth, and right conscience. Sin is a deliberate thought, word, deed, or omission contrary to the eternal law of God (CCC. 1849, 1853, 1854). The primary Hebrew word used in the Old Testament for sin is *chata* and *chataah*, which means to 'miss the mark, forfeit, offend, and sacrifice for it'. The primary Greek word used in the New Testament for sin is *hamartano*, which also means to 'miss the mark'. The early Jewish understanding of the words *chata* and *chataah* are at odds with the practical application and remedy for sin. With Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) ritual we learn that sin is actually a burden/weight that needs to be lifted off/transferred from the present carrier (the individual or community) to a scapegoat/packhorse, which is then sacrificed (cf. Lev. 16:20-22). Later on in Jewish practice and into early Christianity, sin is no longer a burden/weight that is carried, but is now a debt that needs to be paid or forgiven. (cf. Mt. 6:12, 18:21-35; Lk. 7:40-43; Jn. 20:23) In New Testament thought, either God forgives the debt of sin or the debtor can counter the debt through the practice/encumbrance of virtue (cf. Mt. 5:1-12; Lk. 6:20-26, 10:29-37). In Catholic theology, the sacrifice of Christ Jesus on the Cross completely pays the debt accrued by the Original Sin, with prayer and reception of the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation being the ordinary means to be healed from the consequences and affects of sin.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Gen 3:1.

planted in our mind by the source of hate or one of his agents; from there it can then be nurtured and given birth to by humans. Now having been born, what does the lie do next? Well, the only job that this perishable seed of Satan has is to entrench its roots in as much dirt as it can possibly find and, once there, to entrench its roots of corruption as deep in the dirt as permissible.

If you ever had a lie planted within you - then you know exactly about what I write. I have told lies that still roam the world today, looking for fertile dirt to make a home in, and the revelation of the saints about this is that for a lie to die the source of all lies must first be thrown into the Lake of Fire. Until then, a lie may seem to have vanished, but it is actually only waiting for permission and searching for available dirt. I recall a time when I believed the heretical lie of *subordinatism*, but after some further consideration, I dismissed it; but how was it that that lie had come back to me with seven more lies, which were all worse than the first? Even though the lies that I have told in the past may never die, my new prayer is that I might love like Christ to the degree that even after I die, that the love that I have given out will continue.



It is true that the lies that we hear from others are very dangerous, but of all the lies that we hear, there is none more dangerous or more likely to lead our soul into Hell than those lies that we tell ourselves. Wounded dirt will tell itself far more lies than it will ever hear from others. Indeed, we have the potential to be our own worst enemy. Lies can quickly ruin any conscience. The lies that we continually tell ourselves can lead us into narcissism, which is the pinnacle of evil. Lies

detach us from reality, which is the dwelling of the Most High God. Therefore, I encourage you to be vigilant in keeping watch over the things that you tell yourself, examine your thoughts, discern your feelings, think about what you are thinking, and immerse your heart into the Sacred Heart of Jesus by praying for Him to help you keep watch over your senses, imagination, memory, and heart (which are the source of your sin), through Mary, His Immaculate Mother.

In continuing to describe the existence of the Evil One and his minions, by using the concept of the *Circle of Hate*, I proceed even further in saying again that it was God who drew this circle and set it at an unknown distance from the point at its center, and that this point, the circle, and all the hate that is within it, exist only through the permissive will of God. In contrast, in the *Circle of Grace*, the point at its center, and all of the love in between it, exist only through the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God. That God finds it necessary for both of these circles to exist at this time is not the only commonality between them. For, it is also true that there is nothing outside of either circle. There is no gray area between Heaven and Hell. Even in this life, we are either presently on our way to Heaven or on our way to Hell. Even those in Purgatory are on their way to Heaven. *"No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other."*<sup>10</sup>

Although, it is true that one may be on the fringes of either circle and still desire the other. Before an individual's first conversion experience, it is true that they are *near* conversion. It is equally true that before the Israelites entered into the promised land, there were many who yearned greatly for their long awaited inheritance, and there were many who burned with a passion to go back to Egypt. Lot's wife did look back at Sodom and Gomorrah and, consequently, was turned into salt.<sup>11</sup> On the contrary, to be in both at the same time is as impossible as being simultaneously on the wide road to Hell and on the narrow road to Heaven.

When the sacred Scripture says that Satan asked for permission from God to tempt Job, the meaning of the text is just how I have already explained; that through His permissive will God had set a boundary

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<sup>10</sup> Mt. 6:24.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Gen. 19:26.

circle beyond which Satan could not hate on Job. Through the narrative we learn that even though Job did move within the center of the *Circle of Grace*, he never denied the love of God or acquiesced into the *Circle of Hate*. As we contemplate upon the ending of Job's ordeal, we glean one final truth concerning the radius of the *Circle of Hate* in comparison to the *Circle of Grace*; that Satan's desire to hate on humanity is never greater than God's capacity to love on it. Love is always greater than hate and, in consequence, love always wins in the end.

*"Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour. Resist him, steadfast in faith, knowing that your fellow believers throughout the world undergo the same sufferings. The God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory through Christ [Jesus] will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you after you have suffered a little. To Him be dominion forever. Amen"* (1 Peter 5:8-11)

## ON THE FRUITS OF THE EVIL ONE

*"... but that you keep them from the evil one."* Satan would very much like it if no one ever thought of him or ever mentioned his name again, or even the meaning of his name, which is *hate*. The Evil One would prefer to be thought of as some red, pointy tailed demon with two horns and a pitch fork, so that we would not be able to see him in the high-spirited cheerleader or in one of our so-called 'Heroes'. Satan would much rather we discuss the symptoms of sin, such as avarice or factions, or how he approaches us, rather than the true root of sin. It is a victory for the Adversary whenever we waste our time on such symptomatic trivialities.

It has been a long standing tradition in the Catholic Church to categorize the evidence of sin as being evident under the categories of the 'Seven Capital Sins', which are pride, avarice, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony, and slothfulness, and then to further distinguish types of sins under the categories of mortal or venial. Just as it has been common in the Protestant 'apostolic' Pentecostal *community* to talk about the evidence of sin as being evident under the categories of the 'Works of the Flesh', which are immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred,

rivalry, jealousy, outburst of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, occasions of envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like.<sup>12</sup>

Previously I said that Adam, Eve, and Cain were punished for breaking relationship with God after they had chosen Satan over Him, and some of you have been told, in error, that the penance, which you receive sometimes during the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, is also punishment for your sins. The revelation to the saints is that at the very moment we break relationship with God, He provides the path to full reconciliation back to Himself. How merciful is our God? This is what I mean when I say that abundant mercy and grace has been allotted through this prayer of Jesus *and* our daily prayer to God the Father. What interior penance and exterior acts of penance (prayer, fasting, and almsgiving) allows us the opportunity to do is redirect our mind, body, and soul back to the source of all good.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it is because of the consequences of humanities' 'Original Sin' that we have such an awesome opportunity to be reconciled daily to God and with neighbor through penance.

How is relationship broken? We break relationship with God every time we reject His love! Consider our previous reflections on the subject of Love to grasp what I just said. Also, consider the fruit of God's love, which is freedom. Therefore, anytime you ever feel enslaved or trapped to anything temporal of this world (including any legalisms that you feel that you *must* adhere to) you are probably not in a pleasing relationship with God and there may be some things that you are putting ahead of Him in your life.

The most unhealthy and dangerous thing in the universe is not biological viruses, nuclear bombs, or even an alien invasion, but rather it is the effect that sin has on the human soul. Whether the individual's own choices are the source of his sins or the community foisting its sins onto the individual - the effects are always harmful to the soul and to the entire visible and invisible realm. Sin never helps - it always hurts and it always damages the soul and the community, especially when we fail to learn from the experience of falling into Satan's trap. Even mice and other pests eventually learn how to avoid those insidious human snares. After prolonged exposure, even our human bodies develop resistance to

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<sup>12</sup> Gal. 5:19-21.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. CCC 1434.

drugs, viruses, and other chemical agents. So why does the soul have such a difficult time resisting temptation?

It would be inadequate to confess that, 'I repent from sin' or 'I forever turn away from sin,' without the day by day, second by second unceasingly prayer to God, asking for His grace to sustain my confession. When we *Cooperate with God*, He enables/empowers us to be freed from one imperfection at a time, until at last we are finally conformed into the image of His Son.<sup>14</sup>

The good work of predestining us to be conformed to that image will be concluded,<sup>15</sup> but, until that time, we must remain as patient with ourselves as God is with us. Sainthood is the goal, but even the future saint understands how miserable he/she is and what great sins he/she is capable of. To have this discernment of self is great, but it is even more valuable for us to forgive oneself and to trust in the unfathomable mercy of God at all times and for all things.

Furthermore, sin does not happen in a vacuum. Remember the command, "*You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.*"<sup>16</sup> In relation to our present discussion, this means that sin always affects at least three persons - God, neighbor, and self because sin is the hate that opposes and rejects love. One of my favorite examples of this truth can be found in the sin of gambling (tied to theft - thou must not steal).<sup>17</sup> In the first place, gambling always affects these three persons (God, neighbor, and self), because when one gambles he is stealing from God, in that the time used for gambling *could have* been used instead to discern the will of God through prayer or study. Secondly, he is stealing from neighbor, because for him to win, his competitor has to lose; also in this way, he has caused harm to his neighbor by possibly enabling him to also sin against God, neighbor, and self. Lastly, he is stealing from his family the money that *could have* been used to provide for *their* needs.

In consequence of this tripartite, the healing that God provides through the Ministry of Reconciliation is always allotted to all three persons affected; meaning that, by *Cooperating with God's* reconciling

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Jn. 15:5; Eph. 4:11-13.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Rom. 8:28-30; Cf. Phil. 1:6.

<sup>16</sup> Lk. 10:27

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Exo. 20:15, 22:1; Mishnah: Rosh Hashanah 1:8.

grace, our unity with Him, with ourselves, and with neighbor will be restored, and the world will be healed.

It is important to realize that there is a personal evil roaming about in this world. I have actually felt his numbing presence, so I know what I tell you is true. Yet, inasmuch I encourage you to keep that realization, what God most desires is for you to focus on your business of knowing, loving, and serving/trusting Him. In other words, resist the temptation of getting in Satan's business or God's business, rather just focus on those things that God has given you the grace to improve. I have seen so many Christians fall into ruin by getting in Satan's business. Anytime that you are in someone else's business what that means is that you are not taking care of your own. For that reason, Satan loves it when you are worried about His business, and he has plenty of business to keep you busy and distracted. If you would just focus on your processes of living *Life with the Cross*, the results will take care of themselves. Let God and St. Michael worry about Satan, and let Satan worry about getting in your business. If you have ever tried to get into someone's business you know how frustrating and ruinous it is and that is why Satan is so miserable; he can't mind his own business!

The most important thing to understand about sin is that it is not difficult at all to avoid. We make things too hard for ourselves sometimes. If it was so hard not to sin why then did Jesus tell people, who had not been Baptized or who had not received the Holy Spirit, to "Go and sin no more"?<sup>18</sup> Why would YHWH give commandments to people who He thought could not keep them? God is a God of the possible, not the impossible. Therefore, He never commands us to do what we are incapable of doing. He would be a liar if He did that.

Even an atheist can go his/her whole life and not commit a single sin against God, except the greatest of all sins. A person who spends his/her whole life sleeping could avoid committing a single sin against God, except the greatest of all sins. A person who locks himself away and has no contact with people can live a whole life and not commit a single sin against God, except the greatest of all sins. I tell you the truth, avoiding sin alone will not get you into Heaven. All the people who I have mentioned have avoided most sins for their entire life, but they may have also went to Hell. How could that be?

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Jn. 5:14, 8:11.

The reason why those 'good' atheists might go to Hell is for the very same reason why many Christians find avoiding sin to be difficult and frustrating. If you fail to get the first commandment (the first process) right - having absolutely nothing in your life before God, then do not expect the end result to turn out very well for you. *"But seek first the Kingdom [of God] and His righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides."*<sup>19</sup> A truly holy and virtuous life flows out of getting the first commandment right. Too often we try to love God or try to prove that we love God by not sinning. The proper formula is the exact opposite of that; that is, because we love God we avoid sin.

Therefore, I encourage you to nurture your love for God and never neglect to pray for those who may have been affected (knowingly or unknowingly) by your sins, and pray for those, as well, who struggle with the same sins as you.

*"Happy the sinner whose fault is removed, whose sin is forgiven.  
Happy those to whom the Lord imputes no guilt, in whose spirit there is  
no deceit."* (Psalm 32:1-2)

## THE CHIEF ATTRIBUTE OF THE SAINTS OF GOD IS VULNERABILITY

The overall hope of this Petition of Christ Jesus for His Bride, is that she might persevere in the world. The type of perseverance that He expects of us is one of faith-filled resilience against the onslaught of the Evil One, but it is not a downcast attitude at all. On the contrary, those who are *In Christ* are completely full of joy, as they rejoice in the trials and tests of life for the reasons already mentioned in Chapter Seven.

There are many who have come and taught us that the summation of the message of Christ Jesus can be discovered in the word *subversive*. I do agree that the Bride of the Christ is not to be conformed to the beliefs and systems of the world, even to the degree that the world would much rather kill her than to have to look at her Holiness every day.<sup>20</sup> For when the world is in the midst of Holy, it is either drawn closer to it or is repelled by it, because the bride who the world *actually* desires is a whore. Although, if we were to contemplate the good news just a bit deeper, we

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<sup>19</sup> Mt. 6:33.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Wis. 2:12-24.



would discover that the core message of Christ Jesus is not one of subversiveness, but rather is Holy Love. In addition, subversiveness is not a factor in the outpouring of love. Subversiveness is just another one of those words like *punishment* that we had become accustomed to using because we know that adults can understand it better.

Here, I offer you a new word that better embodies the message of the Christ through His outpouring of love. Indeed, this word is foreign to adults, but it is one that the children are quite knowledgeable about and it is the one word that best describes the attitude of the Bride of Christ Jesus. The bride of the world has erected many high walls around herself, even walls more formidable than the ones of Jericho, and as many men whom she welcomes into her flesh, not a one can she suffer to enter into her heart. On the other hand, the Bride of Christ is just the opposite. She is made in the mirror image and likeness of her Bridegroom who *loved* bad company and brought the world true Salvation by freely giving His total self, by letting the world do with Him as they willed and, in fact, as He knew they would.

Vulnerability is a virtue of openness; to being willing to both receive the love of God, neighbor, and self and to give love to the same without reservation, contradiction, or restriction. Vulnerability is open to being born again, hurt, loved, tested, crowned, martyred, and resurrected. Only by prayerfully practicing this virtue can we accept God's will for our life, and what will follow from that acquiescence is an inner-attitude of humility, obedience, simplicity, reverence, and neediness.

I know that asking you to be vulnerable to God, neighbor, and self may be a difficult teaching because we all have been hurt or felt as that we were hurt, and, as a result, we have closed some doors, erected some high walls, and burned some bridges to make sure that we are never hurt in that same way ever again. Yet, the paradox is that as heavy as the Cross is, only a childlike soul can carry it and be open to every pain and joy that comes along the road to Calvary.

I tell you the truth, there are many less perfect ways to persevere in the world, but not a one more fruitful than the one that will fulfill this Petition. Those who preserve in the gift vulnerability are also those who persevere in doing God's will, both here on earth as in Heaven. It is as St. Alphonsus de Liguori wrote in his *Uniformity with God's Will*:

"During our sojourn in this world, we should learn from the saints now in Heaven, how to love God. The pure and perfect love of God they enjoy

there, consists in uniting themselves perfectly to his will. It would be the greatest delight of the seraphs to pile up sand on the seashore or to pull weeds in a garden for all eternity, if they found out such was God's will. Our Lord himself teaches us to ask to do the will of God on earth as the saints do it in Heaven: *"Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."* (Matthew 6:10)."

Therefore, I encourage you to be vulnerable, so that you might also be blessed.

*"Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find favor with God."* (Sirach 4:18)

# ~ *Chapter Nine* ~

## *The Seventh Petition*

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### **‘TO BE CONSECRATED IN TRUTH’**

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#### **The Gospel of John Chapter 17:17 & 19**

Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth. And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth.

A holy human is God's finished product. Beginning with the Sacrament of Baptism, there follows many different processes that God uses to make us whole and we *Cooperate with God* in nearly all of them.

I believe that achieving holiness is a good desire for self, but because holiness is only a merciful result of our *Cooperation with God's* processes, I believe that an even more fruitful desire for self is to desire full obedience to and full cooperation with the will of God.

For some reason my middle daughter Daeja was not as affectionate to me as my other girls were in their youth, but one day, as we were walking, she reached out and grabbed my hand and, at that instant, my heart melted - I almost cried. It was as if my heart had told me that that is exactly what I had wanted her to do in that moment. I believe that God has a similar feeling whenever we *Cooperate with His* will.

## THE PURSUIT OF CONSECRATION

“... so that they may also be consecrated in truth” is the total summation of the previous five *Vulnerable* Petitions, whereas the following Petition is the commissioning of the *Vulnerable* (those sent) - the first *misso* (go forth), so to speak. All of the Petitions prior to this, the Seventh, were prerequisites through grace. We do not accomplish or sustain any effort of our own to fulfill even one of these Petitions, but through the grace of God we grow in knowledge, love, and trust of Him.

The Lamb of God prayed that the Father would *consecrate* them (meaning those that He had prayed for in the previous Petitions) in truth. Jesus said earlier in this prayer that the word (lowercase) of God the Father is truth. We should call to memory our reflections from the Second Petition (to Obey the word of the Father) where I wrote that the lowercase *logos* (word) means Love. Therefore, the revelation here is that Jesus prayed that His Father would *consecrate* all those who are about to be sent in Love (in Jesus - the Truth).

While our interpretive keys for this Petition were laid much earlier in this work, what is a new thought to be explored, before we deal with the meaning of the word *consecrate*, is the manner of the word procession here. God's word (love) is true, inasmuch as God is Love - the fruit following the source, so to speak. In other words, snow is wet and fire is hot. In consequence of that, when it was taught that truth is the highest

good, that was not to say that love is not the highest good, but only that truth is the greatest *fruit* of love (love is truth).

There was a time when what we knew to be true depended solely on what we could know through our five human senses, but through the grace of God's love we have come to know new truths. I also previously said that if a 'thing' does not have the grace (love) of God, then that 'thing' could not exist. The deeper revelation from this Petition is that, what does not exist - is not true (in the deepest reality of God's truth).

Our Lord used the word *consecrate* three times in this Petition, which makes it one of the most significant words in this entire prayer. The word *consecrate*, as used here, comes from the Greek *hagiazō*, which means to make Holy, purify, being in a state of Holiness or sacredness. According to sacred Scripture, God has not only *consecrated* individuals,<sup>1</sup> but also gold,<sup>2</sup> groups of people,<sup>3</sup> a Church,<sup>4</sup> and Old Covenant animal sacrifices.<sup>5</sup> Yet, what is most important for us to know here is that *consecration* is an act of God. That is, God makes whatever He wants Holy. God takes things that are being used for worldly purposes and consecrates them (makes them holy) for His purposes. In contrast, we (humans) cannot make *anything* Holy, for even when we pray the 'Our Father' and say "*Holy be your name*" - it is our happy chance just to *ask* God to vindicate His love (name) by manifesting it. In this way, *hagiazō* is similar to St. Paul's *dikiaosyne* (justification, vindication) where he wrote that Abraham was justified by trusting God,<sup>6</sup> not because he won it, but rather because he accepted and acted upon what God had told him.

*Consecration* is part of the lifelong process of justification, which begins with the reception of the Holy Spirit through the Sacrament of Baptism. Through Baptism, we are officially admitted into the First Degree of Ascent and are cleansed of both humanities' 'Original Sin' and personal sin. Due to, and in consequence of this cleansing and adoption *In Christ*, God is now enabled to lovingly adopt us into the family of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Acts 20:32, 26:18; Jude 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Mt. 23:17, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Rom. 15:16.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 1:2.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Heb. 9:13

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Rom. 4:2-3.

One of the processes by which the Holy Spirit continues to renew our soul and conform us into the image of Christ is called *sanctification*. Through the gift of sanctification, we are enabled to share in the divine life of the Holy Trinity; that is, becoming partakers in the Divine Nature.<sup>7</sup>

Paragraph No. 1266 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sheds light on some of the fruits of justification and sanctification:

“The Most Holy Trinity gives the Baptized sanctifying grace, the grace of *justification*:

- enabling them to believe in God, to hope in Him, and to love Him through the theological virtues;
- giving them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit;
- allowing them to grow in goodness through the moral virtues.

Thus the whole organism of the Christian’s supernatural life has its roots in Baptism.”

For the love of His Father and for us, Christ Jesus made Himself Holy, so that those who would share His life (Body and Blood) would also be *In Him*; that is, those who are grafted into the Vine would also be found worthy in the eyes of His Holy Father. ***And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth.***

The truth is what makes us saints, because Christ prayed that we would be made holy *In Truth*. The saints are truly free beings because they followed Christ (truth the person) and became His disciples, and it was the truth (Jesus) that set them free.<sup>8</sup> This is why the false self (the lie that lives within us) cannot prevail against the fire of God’s purifying love. Saints do not wear masks. The closer that we are drawn to that point at the center of the *Circle of Grace* the more real we become as the direct result of being in closer proximity to that Holy heat and fire which purifies the human soul.

True holiness is found in being made perfect by God through the process of justification, and (through this prayer) Christ Jesus has predestined all the necessary graces for that work to begin within all of

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. 2 Pet. 1:4.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Jn 8:31-32, 14:6.

His disciples, right here on earth - right now. "For this is the will of God, your sanctification."<sup>9</sup>

Since Consecration is a work of God and not of our own human effort, the best that we can do is to remain open to the common will of Holy Trinity in a completely childlike forgetting of self. *Cooperating with God* is all about allowing the Spirit of Truth to be our guide, friend, guard, teacher, master, and ambassador along the journey to being consecrated in truth (that is, In Christ). When you can truly say, as the Christ said, "Not my will, but yours be done," and mean it with your complete self, in love, it will certainly be your happy chance to be raised perfect with the saints and say that you believed in *Cooperating with God* in this Petition.

It has been said that the truth does not need us, but we need the truth. That is, we need God to make us saints, because human souls who are not made saints are, subsequently, not in Heaven, rather they are in Hell. Moreover, being made Holy (consecrated) in love (truth/Jesus) is an expression of God's faith in us; meaning that our consecration is His manifested evidence that He can use us as His vessels in this world and in the next to bring forth His Holy purpose.

More will be said about the process of justification in the next Petition (to Be Missionaries).

*"Then he stretched himself out upon the child three times and called out to the Lord: "O Lord, my God, let the life breath return to the body of this child." The Lord heard the prayer of Elijah; the life breath returned to the child's body and he revived. Taking the child, Elijah brought him down into the house from the upper room and gave him to his mother. "See!" Elijah said to her, "your son is alive." "Now indeed I know that you are a man of God," the woman replied to Elijah. "The word of the Lord comes truly from your mouth." (1 Kings 17:21-24)*

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Thess. 4:3; cf. Eph. 1:4.

# *~ Chapter Ten ~*

## *The Eighth Petition*

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### **‘TO BE MISSIONARIES (FINDING & ACCEPTING OUR VOCATION)’**

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#### **The Gospel of John Chapter 17:18**

As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world.



When I was nine years old and in my first year of fourth grade, I found myself distracted and feeling very lonely. I did not know it at the time, but all the signs were there ever since I was third grade. After eight years of being the only child, I suddenly found myself not coping very well with having to share my territory with my new baby brothers. I will never forget the day that I came home from school and there was no peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a cold glass of chocolate milk waiting for me, like there had been for the last five years of my life. Things had changed for the worse. It felt like the world was coming to an end!

The day that I brought home my second failing report card was another day that will be imprinted in my memory forever. For many kids back then, belt lashing were given out freely and liberally for bad behavior. That evening, my mother entered the room, took off her glasses, and tightened that thick, brown leather belt around her wrist. I had been told, minutes prior to her entry, to strip down to my underwear. I tell you the truth, there is no torture worse than *waiting* to be whapped. Mom stood there just staring at me as I stood on my bed trembling and pressing my back against the wall, wishing that I could just disappear.

Mom never liked giving me whuppins. She always had to make herself angry enough to do it, by asking me questions like, *"What were you thinking?"* A dumb answer, on my part, like, *"I don't know,"* always got her going. However, on this fated day she asked me, *"What do you want to be when you grow up?"* I had not prepared for that question. It was actually a pretty good one considering my grades, but she had caught me off guard and I stammered to avoid saying, *"I don't know."* I felt powerless as I watched her fingers tighten around the belt. *"Huh? Answer my question! What do you want to be when you grow up?"* She was getting angry. I blurted out, **"A PREACHER MOM! A PREACHER! I WANT TO BE A PREACHER!"**

Mind you, the only time we had went to church back then was on Easter, so, I didn't know where that answer had come from, but it turned out to be a very good one obviously, because, after I said it, mom looked deeply in my eyes, put her head down, loosened her grip around the belt, collected her glasses, and left the room. So, it was in the late winter of

1982, while under torture, when God gave me to discern my mission vocation.

## ON THE FATHER SENDING HIS SON, & THE SON SENDING US

The Christ prayed and then we knew  
to Obey the word of His Father  
and in Him to Know

That we are Protected in the Name  
for in the Name of Love we have Joy  
and in that Name we also Persevere

For when He Consecrated us in Truth  
He also Sent us in that Name

The mystery of the Apostolic commission is contained within the words of this poem that harmonizes all of our previous reflections on *Cooperating with God*. As this poem has been our meditation on the processes of the First Degree of the Ascent to Perfection, we now proceed from the last stanza - *He also sent us in that Name*.

*“... so I sent them into the world.”* As was written in the opening of the previous reflection, this Eighth Petition is the commissioning of the *apostles* (those sent forth). In the *Preface* I wrote that it was the Church, the Body of Christ with all of its members, that our Lord sent out; commissioning them to make disciples of all nations, by Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit - to heal the sick, and to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God. What I did not write at that time, but has been elaborated on since, is the spiritual condition of the Church and the individual upon their sending and commissioning.

There are two assumptions taken from this stanza that I find to be unreasonable. The first is that God would send forth stones as disciples and not clay. On the contrary, the *apostle* is always clay and is willing to cooperate with the hands of the Potter. Notice that I did not say that the *apostle* is *always* willing, even though he is always clay, because that is not the nature of an Israelite (one who struggles with God). Call to memory the Israelite Jonah who was sent by God, but as clay had become hardened and dry and, due to this ineffective condition, had to be

thrown into the water by God, so that he could be softened (made vulnerable), remolded, and put under the fire again.

The love in which our Lord sent us cannot be elaborated upon any further through our use of the word *apostle*. Indeed, God did send us out because He loves us, but the word *apostle* speaks more to *who* we are than to *what* we are and, consequently, this word cannot answer any of our most pressing questions right now. To discover exactly *what* we are In Christ we have to go back a few chapters into the *Gospel of John* to find the word that best sums up the previous seven Petitions. “*Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in Him. “If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*”<sup>1</sup> Even though the Lord never mentions the word discipleship in this prayer, it emerges to be its true underlining energy. In fact, as you can see from this passage alone, *discipleship* is what connects a number of other key words that we have already discussed in greater detail (e.g. remains, word, knowing and truth).

To know the truth is to be spiritually able to love God with all of our soul, all of our heart, all of our strength, all of our mind, and our neighbor as we love ourselves, and while there is some suffering and brokenness that leads the disciple to this level of knowledge, love, and service/trust, from it also comes that true spiritual freedom. This leads us to the second unreasonable assumption, that God would send out anyone less than a *disciple* who knows the truth.

In regards to *Cooperating with God*, the disciple who is sent can almost expect for his/her self-will to struggle against the will of God. Such is the nature of an Israelite, but one of the fruits of the Sacrament of Baptism is continuous repentance on our part. As we proceed from the point of rebirth to matriculate through grace and draw nearer to that point in the center of the *Circle of Grace*, God consecrates us, which then allows us to always persevere (regardless of the matter or form of our suffering) and this perseverance can lead us to perfection.

St. Paul spoke of this process (consecration) that all disciples of Christ go through, in this way, “*For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He might be the first born of many brothers.*”<sup>2</sup> That is, through the Baptism of Adoption (becoming new

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<sup>1</sup> Jn 8:31-32.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 8:29.

creatures) God sets (ordains, predestines) the soul on a course to take on the new Adam, just as the Christ took on the old Adam.<sup>3</sup> Then the Apostle added, "And those He predestined [[Baptized/adopted]] He also called, and those He called He also justified, and those He justified He also glorified."<sup>4</sup> That is, the Adoption of Baptism, the cleansing from humanities' 'Original Sin' is what makes the disciple eligible to receive the grace to persevere in holiness to the end (justification), and those who persevere to the end are the same victors who will be glorified in Heaven.<sup>5</sup>

Justification is a perpetually gracious act from God through which the Holy Spirit works to conform (mold/shape) the disciple into the image of Christ Jesus through the remission of sins, sanctification, and renewal of the interior man.<sup>6</sup> We faithfully participate and *Cooperate with God* in this great work by conforming our self-wills and self-desires to His. Whatever our self-interests are, they are nothing in the light of living only for God's will, God's interest, and God's desires.

In his *The Instructor of Children*, written in 202 C.E., St. Clement of Alexandria spoke about how the process of justification begins with the Sacrament of Baptism in this way:

When we are Baptized, we are enlightened. Being enlightened, we are adopted as sons. Adopted as sons, we are made perfect. Made perfect, we are made divine. "I say," He declares, "*you are gods and sons all of the Most High.*"<sup>7</sup> This work is variously called grace, illumination, perfection, and washing.<sup>8</sup> It is a washing by which we are cleansed of sins; a gift of grace by which the punishments due our sins are remitted; an illumination by which we behold that holy light of Salvation - that is, by which we see God clearly; and we call that perfection which leaves nothing lacking. Indeed, if a man knows God, what more does he need? Certainly it were out of place to call that which is not completed a true gift of God's grace. Because God is perfect, the gifts He bestows are perfect.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Rom. 5:14-17, 8:15,23, 9:4; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. 8:30; Cf. Jn. 1:12.

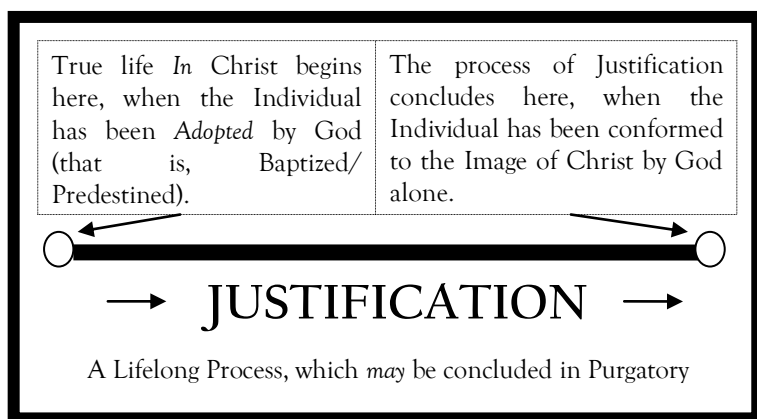
<sup>5</sup> Cf. Mt. 10:22; Rev. 2:26, 3:15.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. CCC 1987-1989.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. 82:6.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Rom. 5:2, 15, 7:25; Eph. 5:26; Titus 3:5; Heb. 6:4, 7:11, 10:32; Jas. 1:17.

Now, in the light of clearer language, we can transliterate Paul's verses to read, "Those who freely responded to God's loving grace (loving mercy), He also adopted, through Baptism, to be conformed to the image of His Son . . . And those He adopted He also called to holiness (consecrate), and those He called to holiness He also sustained (propelled) through the lifelong process of justification, and those He justified He also glorified (made holy) on earth and in Heaven." See the chart below for a visual clarification of this process.



ridiculous, to say the least. What parent is happy that his/her child disobeys them or brings home failing grades from school?

The picture of our journey to the center of the *Circle of Grace* is painted more clearly in *Cooperating with God: Life as a Divine Song*, but for now, consider this image: God has allowed me to enjoy a vision where I am in the middle of a garden and hugging a tree. Where initially I could only see it from afar, the tree then changes into the figure a man wearing a brilliant white robe and brown sandals. Baptism, continued Repentance, Perseverance, and Perfection are the way of *Discipleship*. In the next Reflection I will elaborate further upon these things in the Six Degrees of Freedom.

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.” (Luke 4:18-19)*

*“If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26)*

## ON THE SIX DEGREES OF FREEDOM

*“As you sent me . . . so I sent them into the world.”* I do not teach people to imitate Christ or tell people to do what Jesus would do, if that means to mimic the Jesus of the Bible. That teaching is very inadequate and displaces the mission of the Holy Spirit within us and in the Church. On the contrary, what has been revealed to the saints is something much more effective and embodies the belief that those who are *In Christ* must fully *Cooperate with God* to the extent of experiencing their *own* passion in this world.

The reward of being sent in the way that Christ Jesus was sent is true freedom. I believe that there are Six Degrees through which all of Christ's disciples who are sent must matriculate through to receive that Freedom. *Freedom* meaning; freedom in God. This brand of freedom never includes any form of bondage to Satan, but is always totally unencumbered to know, love, and serve/trust God, neighbor, and self.

The truth is what sets us free<sup>11</sup> and Christ Jesus said that the word of God is truth,<sup>12</sup> that He Himself is the truth, and that if we follow Him we will be His disciples and we will know the truth (Him) and the truth (He) will set us free - free to lovingly lose our life, so that we might gain true life In Him.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the path to true freedom is found only through Jesus (love/the logos/word of God) and discipleship.

It should be noted, solely for reconciliations sake, that the first four Degrees of Freedom belong to the First Degree (Discipleship) of the Ascent to Perfection, while the Fifth Degree (Vulnerability) of Freedom transpires in the Second Degree of Ascent, with the last Degree of Freedom (Vesselhood) taking place in the last Degree of Ascent. Therefore, we begin with the First Degree of Freedom:

1. A Mission is Set for You:

The proper response to grace is as follows: that we accept the vocation(s) that God prepared for us even before we were born. *"The word of the Lord came to me thus: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you. Before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you."*<sup>14</sup> The Gospel of John records that, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life."*<sup>15</sup> Because freewill does allow us the option, it is true that Jeremiah could have chosen his own life mission, and it is equally true that if he had done so he would have rejected the good, pleasing, and perfect grace that God had purposed for him in the beginning.

The meaning here is that we have to accept our vocation(s) with total humility and vulnerability, because it has absolutely nothing to do with us (as individuals). That is, our life is not about us, or as Father Robert E. Barron would say, *"It is your life and it is you, but it has nothing to do with you."* We are nothing greater than vessels that God uses to send out into the world, because He loves it so. God loves the world and wishes that not

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Jn. 8:31-32.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Jn. 17:17.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Jn. 8:31-32, 14:6.

<sup>14</sup> Jer. 1:5.

<sup>15</sup> Jn. 3:16.

one soul perishes,<sup>16</sup> and that is why He sent Moses and why He will continue to send out dirt until the end of the age.

## 2. You are Born of Woman:

Of course we must be born of woman just as our Lord was, because the woman is in the world and the world is where the dirt is, and it is to the dirt that we have been sent. Yet, there are three perplexing mysteries and one problem in this Degree of Freedom.

The first mystery concerns why God prefers to use dirt to help Save dirt, sheep to minister to sheep, and beggars to show other beggars where the free bread is. Certainly, the angels could have visibly dwelt among us and been more effective ministers, but God seemed much keen on creating men and women, so that He can conform them to His will and use them to draw more of their kind to be in communion with Him.

Christ Jesus came into the world with obviously the most important mission that God had ever entrusted anyone to accomplish, and for His assistants He chose not tried and established rabbis from the city of Jerusalem, but rather fishermen from Galilee. That hiring process is comparable to a person starting a multi-national corporation with high school dropouts, rather than MBA graduates from Ave Marie University. It does sound ludicrous, but as St. Paul wrote to the Churches of Corinth, *"Rather, God chose the foolishness of the world to shame the wise, and God chose the weak of the world to shame the strong."*<sup>17</sup>

The second mystery is like the first. God continues to shame the wise and strong with our Blessed Mother Mary the Virgin of Nazareth who is the most vulnerable of all His children. We are all born of woman and in the second Eve we have a Heavenly Mother and a perfect example of an earthly parent who we can imitate. The mother nurses the child, teaches it the essentials of life, and God uses her to prepare the child's way, and to this day our Mother Mary continues to pray with and for her children

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Jn. 3:16; 2 Pet. 3:9.

<sup>17</sup> Rom. 1:27.



and visits them to nurse them through their distress. St. Mary, being the perfect union, was the first fruits of the glorified Church and our totally human living model of holiness - par excellence. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states in Paragraph No. 829:

“But while in the most Blessed Virgin the Church has already reached that perfection whereby she exists without spot or wrinkle, the faithful still strive to conquer sin and increase in holiness. And so they turn their eyes to Mary”:<sup>18</sup> in Her, the Church is already the “all-holy.””

The problem is not in those who accept their mission as vessels to be sent into the world, but it is in those who will not *accept* their task in the world, because they would rather escape it. They impatiently wait for some pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation rapture and all the while miss every ounce of grace that God has purposed for their life to draw others into relationship with Him. The world was set free from sin because the Christ accepted His mission from our Heavenly Father. In the same way, we are set free when we accept our mission, rather than sitting on our butts waiting; and all the while complaining about how sinful the world is becoming and waiting on God to take us out of it.

### 3. You are Prepared for your Mission:

God's method of preparing us, whether primarily through our family, our community, or our environment is of very little importance because we are typically uninformed (immediately) as to how God conforms *our* choices into *His* glory. Yet, what is vitally important is that we come to the knowledge that our Holy God did prepare us, just as the gardener meticulously prepared His dirt for His only seed.

We are first related to each other through our substance and secondly through our path. That is to say, that we are first related through our humanity and then through our choice of circle - the *Circle of Grace* or the *Circle of Hate*. Therefore, we

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<sup>18</sup> Lumen Gentium 13 §§ 1-2; cf. Jn. 11:52.

must not fall into the trap of ministering only to those that we have something in common with on the most basic of levels. It is one thing to believe that Christ Jesus came to Save the Jew and the Gentile or that He came to Save sinners, but it is a better thing to believe that He came to Save His creation from self-ruin. It is true that a woman who God has delivered from alcoholism does have a mission to other women who are struggling with that same sin, but God has also given that same woman a mission to men in that sin, and, indeed, to *anyone* who is addicted to *anything*, and even to *everyone* in broken relationship with God. Essentially, the truth that brought her out of sin is equally applicable to everyone who is caught in the snares of Satan's lies.

The brand of true freedom that we are discussing here is not found in the fact that we were prepared or how God wants to use us, rather it is found in our *Cooperation with Him* as vessels and our desire to be poured out.

#### 4. A Way is Prepared for You:

There is a beautiful mystery related to this prayer, that on the night preceding His death our Lord prayed that we might pray to *Cooperate with His* mission in the world. There is a second mystery that is related to this Degree of Freedom as well, that God has prepared a unique way for you, so that He might use you to help others along the way. Call to memory Moses, who spent forty years in the desert pasturing sheep *before* he spent forty more years in the same desert pasturing the children of Israel.

I must now make a distinction between the two ways. To *Cooperate with God* in this prayer is not the life of a spiritual solitary hermit, but rather a life of active engagement in the world. Inconsequence of God sending out dirt to help save dirt, we will always be in harm's way. Satan seems to have a particular interest in accusing people like us.

Along the way we will encounter all the same people as Joseph (son of Jacob) did and, if we remain in the *Circle of Grace*, God will be glorified by our life in the end. That is, despite our family members who will plot against us, Midianties who would take advantage of us, people like Potiphars' wife who will tempt

us into sin, individuals such as Potiphar who will falsely persecute us, and chief cupbearers who we will assist, but will, ultimately, show us no gratitude - in the end, God will deliver us from all of their evil machinations if only we remain *In Christ*. Even though this type of suffering is necessary and relevant for our spiritual growth - to fall into the company of such people will eventually lead us into the *Circle of Hate*, because there is no good, pleasing, or perfect grace in relationships with those who have no desire to *Cooperate with God* as we do.

Then there are those individuals who we meet within the *Circle of Grace*. These people have been stationed there by God Himself to help elevate our level of usefulness and union to Him. St. Paul likened to call these persons our 'co-workers' *In Christ*. They are the people who we meet not long before or after we begin our mission. It was his father-in-law Jethro, the Priest of Midian, who Moses learned a great deal from during his time with him and whose advice he took that significantly influenced the Israelite's way of life.<sup>19</sup> It was Rahab who prepared the way for Joshua and the Twelve Tribes to receive their inheritance of the Promised Land. It was John the Waymaker who appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, thus preparing the way for the Messiah.

There are a number of signs that become evident when we come into relationship with a co-worker *In Christ*. The most obvious being the fruits of the Spirit, namely peace and love. In fact, I find one of the most meaningful of graces, evident in the company of co-workers, is the anticipation of needs that they have for you and you for them. The person(s) who God places in your life respond to your needs and you to theirs, oftentimes even before either of you had confessed your needs. In contrast, the person(s) who Satan sends into your life always makes it their job to exploit your weaknesses to temptation. Whereas, co-workers *In Christ* are sent to build you up, Satan's friends are sent to tear you down.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Exo. 18:13-27.

The freedom that we feel in this degree comes from us simply being on the way and knowing it. The comfort and security that being in the *Circle of Grace* with our co-workers is a liberating feeling. Now, more than ever before, we know that all things are possible through love.

5. You Receive the First Installment of Your Inheritance:

The Gardener looks upon the remaining nations to come forth - those who will have the happy chance to hear the good news in the last days before the womb of woman becomes barren. With His hand over all the nations, the Gardener selects one at a time, one singular grain of dirt and says, "Dirt you belong to me. I am your Creator. Holy Love has prepared a mission for you. Dirt you are and to dirt you are sent. I command you to bear fruit for the sake of my only seed." So the dirt is sent and a new nation is born of woman who, along with the environs and his choices, prepares the dirt for what the Gardener has willed. The Gardner, seeing the time approaching, sends out other grains of dirt to prepare the way for this particular grain, and when the fullness of time has come, when the dirt (the nation) will receive its seed, the Christ says, "*Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you.*"<sup>20</sup> Then He breathes upon the nation and says, "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*"<sup>21</sup>

The first chapter of the *Gospel of Mark* speaks to the preparation of Christ Jesus for His public ministry, which is very similar to our preparation. In secret, God the Father declared the mission for His only begotten Son and, in secret, He was born of woman and prepared. Then John the Waymaker was sent, whom Jesus met and was baptized by in the Jordan River shortly before His public ministry began. For us, the Sacrament of Baptism marks the pivotal turning point on the way to ascent, as we are cleansed of humanities' 'Original Sin' and are forgiven of all previous personal sins.

Inasmuch as our mission is similar to His in several ways, in other ways it is drastically different. Christ Jesus was sent to

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<sup>20</sup> Jn. 20:21-22.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

destroy sin and death. He who did not know sin took on all the sins of humanity at His Baptism. In other words, the Jews and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem went out into the desert to receive forgiveness of their sins through the baptism of John in the Jordan River, but when He who had no sins to be forgiven of came to be baptized the opposite affect held to be true. Speaking figuratively now, it is to say, that all of the sins that humanity had committed against God had never left the water into which they were washed, but when John the Waymaker had taken the true sacrificial Lamb and immersed Him into the water, all of humanities sins were poured, infused, and absorbed into His flesh, once and for all,<sup>22</sup> and this was the fulfillment of sacred Scripture:

*"When he has completed the atonement rite for the sanctuary, the meeting tent and the altar, Aaron shall bring forward the live goat. Laying both hands on its head, he shall confess over it all the sinful faults and transgressions of the Israelites, and so put them on the goat's head. He shall then have it led into the desert by an attendant. Since the goat is to carry off their iniquities to an isolated region, it must be sent away into the desert."*<sup>23</sup>

Christ Jesus, after taking on the sins of humanity was led by the Spirit into the desert where He remained for forty days, being tempted by Satan. This is why I do not teach others to imitate the Jesus of the Bible, because our mission is not identical to His. We are *not* the Lamb of God. Yet, as Christ Jesus received a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit after His Baptism, so did His Mother Mary and the Apostles at Pentecost,<sup>24</sup> and so do we at the Sacrament of Confirmation or at whatever time that God finds to be perfect. This unique outpouring increases the gifts of the Holy Spirit within us - whereas we are now more closely united with the Holy Trinity and to the Church. Through this outpouring of grace we are endowed with the special ability to always choose good and flee from evil and are strengthened to

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Heb. 10:11-14.

<sup>23</sup> Lev. 16:20-22.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Acts. 1:13-14, 2:1-4.

spread and defend the good news through our words, walk, and works, and to never be ashamed of the Cross.<sup>25</sup> In consequence of this outpouring of the Holy Spirit we can have victory and joy during our lifelong desert experience of temptation and suffering. Only because of this outpouring of grace can we be effective preachers, teachers, and healers in the name of Jesus (Love). The deep inner craving found in all disciples of God is to be free to serve Him without the hindrance of self-will. That degree of servitude is the ultimate fruit of the outpouring of grace.

Without receiving this special grace of the Holy Spirit or the previous Degrees of Freedom, one will never be able to persevere in one's vocation(s) with true joy. That is to say, that to serve as a *disciple* without being prepared for *discipleship* is impossible. Neither can we come into our mission, lest a way has first been prepared for us by God. Do many of our impatient brothers and sisters jump right into their vocation or what they think *might be* their vocation without first going through the prerequisite degrees? Indeed, many do. How freely can God use such an impatient soul and how much fruit can a leap frog produce? Unfortunately, not much at all!

6. Give fully of ourselves unto God, even after our Death:

This last Degree of Freedom is self-explanatory, is it not? At what point in life do those who are *In Christ* not serve God? The answer is - at no time does the true *disciple* of Christ not serve God; for not to serve God is to not love God. This level of commitment can seem to be intimidating and even impossible for some, because there is so much uncertainty about sacrificing, suffering, and dying. Yet, through faith and trust in God, we can resolve our fears, and that is the difference between being slaves rather than friends of God. We may not know how we will serve God in the life to come, but today our broad vocation has been made very clear. We must always serve our God and we must always serve our neighbor to the very best of our ability.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. CCC 1302-1305.

One of the great marks of sainthood is that a saint is rarely 'Out of Place'; meaning they are usually always where God can use them the best; that is, where the fullness of God's grace is always available to them. The soul of the saint is sensitive in this regard, where others are dull to those divine messages that sometimes tells us that 'You shouldn't be here', or 'You should be still', or 'Pray right now'.

Later, in the *Gospel of John*, the resurrected Christ Jesus told Simon Peter that pasturing and shepherding the sheep of God was a condition of loving Him.<sup>26</sup> In other words, Peter would have been 'Out of Place' if he were to go back to fishing for fish. For God had reserved special graces for Peter, not on a fishing boat, but as the head of His infant Catholic Church. Then the Lord said:

*"Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted, but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had said this, He said to him, "Follow me."*<sup>27</sup>

The meaning here is one of Christ-like Passion, that we were saved not by what our Lord did, but by what His love had allowed evil to do to Him. See how our conversation has come full circle again? The way of serving the common will of God, without serving any lesser will, is the perfection of Freedom, and the Bride of Christ not only freely loves God, but she is also completely vulnerable to His will for her life. Her holy vulnerability is the just result of her love having been perfected through preserving grace - inasmuch as she has *Cooperated with God*. "Follow Me."

*"Tend the flock of God in your midst, [overseeing] not by constraint but willingly, as God would have it, not for shameful profit but eagerly. Do not lord it over those assigned to you, but be examples to the flock. And*

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Jn. 21:15-19.

<sup>27</sup> Jn. 21:18-19.

*when the chief Shepherd is revealed, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” (1 Peter 5:2-4)*

## ABOUT A MAN WHO HAD HIS OWN LIFE GOALS

There was a man who I knew not long ago, whose top two goals in life were to become the Grand Master of Freemasons in his home state and to become the President of the university of which he was also an alumnus. Given that this man was married with children, one would think that his top two goals in life would have been more family-oriented, but that was not the case. If you were to make the judgment that this man must have been very superficial, if not just plain ole narcissistic, then you would not be at all incorrect. Yet, according to others who knew this man as well (back before his suffering had begun), they all attest that he was not many years away from achieving both of his life goals.

As for his own humble assessment of himself, I asked him once, *“How is it that you achieve everything that you seem to put your mind to?”* to which he replied, *“It’s like I’m the golden child. Everything that I put all of my energy into just always ends up working out for me in the end. I may stumble but I never fall down. Someone could throw me out of an airplane without a parachute and I would still land on my feet unharmed.”*

It is true that God does cause both the rain and the sunshine to pour down upon the good and evil, and it is also true that there is the illusion of peace, success, and victory within the *Circle of Hate*. Yet, the distinction that is being made here is not one of justice, but rather the danger of narcissism, which is inherently evil and the first fruit of Satan’s pride. To blatantly shun our Creator’s will for our life, in favor of our own ambitions or the ambitions imposed on us by other wounded dirt, is a grave sin and even graver than any other of the choices that we may have made in the *Circle of Hate*. Know this - the road to Hell is paved with our own ambitions! For anyone to live a life outside of the *Circle of Grace* is to live a life that is not in true relationship with God, which is the community of the risen Christ found in the Kingdom of God.

*“Then I saw that all the toil and skillful work is the rivalry of one man for another. This also is vanity and a chase after wind.”*

(Ecclesiastes 4:4)



## FATHER GOD, WHAT IS YOUR WILL FOR MY LIFE?

While I was at university and even during my first professional career, I had the opportunity to be amongst many students and professors from the continent of Africa, and this one thing I had come to admire most about their culture - that when they asked another person his or her name, and it happened to be a word that was unknown to them, they would then inquire further still by asking that person what is the *meaning* of his or her name. Even though the reply to their question was usually, 'I don't know', God has revealed Himself in this nuisance and clash of cultures. In the instant case, while we are in the flesh we probably may not presently know the name that God has reserved for us on that White Stone,<sup>28</sup> but I would surely wager that the meaning of that name has everything to do with our intended vesselhood.

In *Cooperating with God - The Life with the Cross* I unfurled our understanding of the term *vocation* into three types, but here I move to define the word *vocation* as being that vehicle through which those who have received the love and mercy of God, are *empowered* to share it with others.<sup>29</sup> The fact that God desires that our life has real purpose and meaning is not a very difficult truth to grasp, rather, it is only the specific *details* of that truth that seem to allude and trouble us the most.

At this point in the lesson some spiritual directors would encourage you to prayerfully seek out your vocation and offer you a bevy of other helpful hints and tips as to how to do so, but rather than offering you the obvious, I move to revisit what I call the chief attribute of sainthood (which is vulnerability). The Bride of the Christ is vulnerable to God and she loves the fact that grace has perfected that simple virtue in her. She does not care how, when, or where God wants to use her, for she is just happy to be used by her Beloved.

Think of the Holy Spirit and God's love as being water; that is, the living-water, which He desires to share with every soul. Now think of yourself and your vocation as the sponge that God wants to use to spread His water wherever He deems pleasing. A sponge that is not very porous will not absorb much water and, as a result, will not be very useful. In contrast, a sponge that is vulnerable to the water is one that is very porous and, as a result, can be fully and freely penetrated by the water

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Rev. 2:17.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Jn. 15:5; Eph. 4:11-13.

that it absorbs. Likewise, we are only as useful in our vocation to the degree that we are able to be filled with God's love, harness it, and freely pour it out onto others.

Let us delve into the lives of Abram, Moses, Jonah, John the Waymaker, and St. Therese of Lisieux to make some additional observations about the virtue of vulnerability: Abram did not care where God was sending him or why God wanted to bless him. The Lord said to Abram, "*Go forth from your father's house to a land that I will show you . . . Abram went as the Lord directed Him.*"<sup>30</sup> Abram was vulnerable to God's will. Moses said to God, "*Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt? . . . But suppose they will not believe me, nor listen to my plea? . . . I have never been eloquent, neither in the past, nor recently, nor now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and tongue.*"<sup>31</sup> Moses, in his weakness, trusted God - he was vulnerable. Jonah said to the men on the ship, "*Pick me up and throw me into the sea, that it may quiet down for you, since I know it is because of me that this violent storm has come upon you.*"<sup>32</sup> Jonah did seem to prefer his own will when it came to the Salvation of the Ninevites, but he was always vulnerable to the chastisement of God. The word vulnerable would be one of the words that we would use to describe the life of John the Waymaker, but it was at the end of his life when he seemed to express some sign of doubt and uncertainty. "*When John heard in prison of the works of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to Him with this question, 'Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?'*"<sup>33</sup> One type of wisdom suggest that it is acceptable at the end of our life to question whether we have lived a life according to the will of God, but there is a second and more perfect wisdom that says that we should ask of ourselves this question every single second of the day.

You will find our true vocation in life when you find that place where God can use you the best; that is, where God can easily pick His vessel (you) up and liberally pour His love out of it and onto His creatures. In a much more narrow sense, a true vocation is always endowed with the grace and capacity to bring glory to God and to inspire

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<sup>30</sup> Gen. 12:1 . . . 4.

<sup>31</sup> Exo. 2:11 . . . 4:1 . . . 4:10.

<sup>32</sup> Jonah 1:12.

<sup>33</sup> Jn. 11:2.

all human souls to draw nearer to Him. True vocation never impugns one's path to holiness, rather, it always serves neighbor far more than it serves self. A true vocation may indeed serve great benefits to self, but this occurs only after it has first served God and neighbor and, in consequence of serving the first two, the last is also blessed. In other words, a true vocation is what is always best first for God and neighbor. This is why your best vocation is so hard to find while you are still in the dark cloud of self-interest and pride. My helpful hint is this: Whenever you find how you can best help your neighbor, you will have also found your best vocation.

There are many vocations in this world that can lead the soul to death. In fact, that is the primary difference between a vocation that *Cooperates with God* and one that cooperates with Satan. To the degree that our vocation always helps the will of God and hinders the will of Satan, the better off the world will be. In her autobiography *The Story of a Soul*, St. Therese of Lisieux (France) wrote about the value of having a vocation that *Cooperates with God* in this way:

"I know God needs no help to carry out His work of sanctification, He lets a skilled gardener rear rare and delicate plants. He has given him the necessary knowledge, but He fertilizes them Himself. That is exactly how He wishes to be helped in cultivating souls."

To the profane, vulnerability (exhibited by the disciples of Christ) has the appearance of being nothing less than sheer reckless abandon, weakness, and lunacy, because of its desire to forsake that which is only temporal, in favor of carrying out that which is Divine. The reason why the world does not understand what propels a Christian to accept martyrdom or to take on the voluntary vows of celibacy, chastity, and poverty is because the world does not grasp the value of being vulnerable to something greater than self.

Even in her short life, St. Therese had come to understand the true meaning of service to God in writing, "Jesus, my love! At last I have found my vocation. My vocation is love! . . . I will *be* love."<sup>34</sup> In such a short, simple, and eloquent phrase, Therese had encapsulated the entire Passion of Christ Jesus. These few simple words of God's Little Flower has the potential to transform the world's definition and understanding

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<sup>34</sup> *The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux: The Story of a Soul*

of what it truly means to *have a life*, to *make a living*, or to *live life*. They would come to believe that outside of living to know, to love, and to serve/trust God and neighbor is death.

*Cooperating with God* as His disciple is a matter of active trust in His name and the meaning of His Holy Name (Love). Moreover, the disciple of God must Fear the Lord, Love what He created, and Hate what He did not,<sup>35</sup> to do otherwise is to sin against God. Therefore, we must Love the Truth and Hate the lie.

*“When you have done all you have been commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.’”*

(Luke 17:10)

“From Him, “the whole body, supplied and built up by joints and ligaments, attains a growth that is of God: (Col 2:19). He continually distributes in His body, that is, in the Church, gifts of ministries in which, by His own power, we serve each other unto Salvation so that, carrying out the truth in love, we might through all things grow unto Him who is our head (Cf. Eph. 4:11:16).”

**(Lumen Gentium 7, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)**

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Wis. 11:24.



# SECTION

# THREE

VULNERABILITY

(ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC & APOSTOLIC)

# *~ Chapter Eleven ~*

## *The Ninth Petition*

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### **‘TO BELIEVE IN THE MESSAGE OF HIS APOSTLES’**

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#### **The Gospel of John Chapter 17:20**

I pray not only for them, but also for those who  
will believe in me through their word,

**T**he great thing about Catholicism is that the Catholic Church is who She says She is and it works! For nearly two millennium, She has been proven, tested, and undefeated. No government, religion, man, plague, heresy, lie, scandal, law, or persecution has ever prevailed against Her. Satan hates Her because She has a foot on his neck and he cannot do a thing about it.

Give me a t-shirt that says 'Proud Catholic' and I will wear it anywhere! I am not ashamed to be a Catholic! Give me a roman collar and I will hug any child, anywhere! Bad priest do not define me! Give me a hat that says, 'I Love the Virgin Mary' and I will wear it to a Baptist revival. I am not embarrassed of my Mother or her apparitions! Call me a papist and I will give you a high-five. I love the Peterine Ministry! Call me Catholic until I die. In fact, call me anything you like, just remember to call on me to pray for you in the name of Jesus ~ in this life and in the next. I love our Church and our saints!

## THAT GRACE HAS BEEN APPORTIONED FOR ALL TO BELONG TO THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Second Degree of the Ascent to Perfection begins here, with those who have been given the word now being called to give it away, and Christ Jesus is praying that their word will be believed. Whereas in the Second Petition (*to Obey the Word of the Father*) Jesus prayed, ***"They belonged to you, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word,"*** He now prays, ***"I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."*** 'Them' historically meaning the Apostles (the Eleven who were sent) and *perpetually* meaning the Apostolic Church and Her apostles (the many who will be sent).

***"But also for those."*** Call to memory St. Thomas who walked with the Lord during His earthly ministry, and seemingly had become spoiled with all the evidence of miracles and wonderful signs. In consequence of his advantageous and disadvantageous position Thomas felt that he needed yet another sign to believe in the resurrected Christ Jesus. In response, Jesus said to him, *"Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believe."*<sup>1</sup> In that regard, when the Christ said that He prayed ***"not only for them,"*** He was

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<sup>1</sup> Jn. 20:20.



referring to those who have seen and heard (primarily the Apostles), and for the remainder of this prayer (*"but also for those"*) He will be speaking in detail as to how those who have not seen or heard will be blessed through the word given to and spoken by His Apostles.

There are a number of distinctions that can be inferred here. The first being the distinction between the seedling Church before the Ascension and the infant Church after the Pentecost. The former being composed of those who did see and hear, and the latter consisting mainly of those who did not see nor hear God when He came in the flesh. There is the distinction between the local community of Jerusalem who did see and hear versus the broader universal (catholic) community, most of whom only came to believe after hearing the word from the Apostles. Then there is the perpetual application of the responsibility of those of whom God has given His word to go out and proclaim it, *"Go therefore . . ."*<sup>2</sup>

This is a difficult reflection for non-Catholics and those who believe only in the unscriptural Invisible Universal Church, but I will not launch into an exhaustive defense of that truth here. Later, we will meditate on the insufficiency of grace in the protesting community and other non-Catholic organizations, but for now it is enough to say that the modern Catholic Church, which is spread throughout the world, in union with the Church of Rome (where the successor to St. Peter, the chief Apostle, presides), and has continued in evolutionary perpetuity ever since the time of Christ Jesus is the true Apostolic Church of Christ. It is this Church, which was established by His Apostles themselves through Christ's authority, who has always taught the same one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all.<sup>3</sup> This belief of the Catholic Church was reaffirmed at Vatican II, on November 21, 1964:

"This is the one Church of Christ which in the Creed is professed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic,<sup>4</sup> which our Savior, after his resurrection, commissioned Peter to shepherd (Jn. 21:17), and him and the other apostles to extend and direct with authority (Cf. Mt. 28:18f.), which he erected for all ages as "the pillar and mainstay of the truth" (1 Tm. 3:15).

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Mt. 28:19.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Eph. 4:5-6; Rev. 7:9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Apostles' Creed, Denz. 6:9 (10-13); Nicene-Const. Creed, Denz. 86 (150), coll. *Tridentine Profession of Faith*, Denz. 994, 999 (1862 and 1868).

This Church constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsist in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the Successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him<sup>5</sup> although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity.<sup>6"</sup>

The reason why it is hard to accept the truth that our Lord Christ Jesus established only one Church (one Body) that He desires all of us to be members in is not because of any lack of evidence or faith, but only because of our Israelite nature - we struggle against the Love of God. And what greater love is there than in God giving us the gift of His one Church in His one Kingdom, where His Real Presence can be found in the Sacrament of the Eucharist? It takes the grace of vulnerability to accept this truth. When we rub the nose of the protester in the evidence and miracles of this truth, they are then forced to accept the reality of the lie which they had believed. Now, their next decision is a scary one. In reasoning with themselves they reason with the flesh, 'If what I believe is a lie, then that means that a piece of me is also a lie, and am I willing to be a vulnerable child and be re-educated? Or will I defend the lie because I must defend my pretense of an existence.' Martin Luther reasoned to chose the latter and His lies have divided, shamed, scandalized, and destroyed the community ever since. There is no love in the institutional protest and there never will be, because it was brought forth by Satan's evil seeds named narcissism, pride, evil, and hate.

While there is no hope for the church in protest, because it was built upon the demonic foundation of a lie and not the rock, there remains to be a sufficient amount of grace for those who have believed in the lie to come into the truth of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, because Christ Jesus prayed that we would be united in such a way in this Petition and in the next. To support this truth we point to the nearly two thousand year old perpetuity of Catholic Church as being the

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<sup>5</sup> It is called: *Sancta (catholica apostolica) Romana Ecclesia* in the *Tridentine Profession of Faith*, loc. cit. and First Vatican Ecumenical Council, Session III, Constitution *Dei Filius*, Denz. 1782 (3001).

<sup>6</sup> Lumen Gentium 8, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican II.

evidence of His prayer successfully working. Yet, let us turn to sacred Scripture and show how this apportioned grace actually works:

*"The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas to Beroea during the night. Upon arrival they went to the synagogue of the Jews. These Jews were more fair minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with all willingness and examined the Scriptures daily to determine whether these things were so. Many of them became believers, as did not a few of the influential Greek women and men."*<sup>7</sup>

This prayer of our Lord allowed four amazing things to take place in Beroea. Take note of this phrase, *"believe in me through their word."* First, the word of God (which is His Love) poured out of the thoughts, words, and actions of His Apostles and, in that Spirit, Paul and Silas were sent to Beroea. Secondly, the Apostles went to where there was dirt that was ready to receive the seed. Thirdly, the dirt received the word from the Apostles and compared it with the word of the prophets. Lastly, faith and evidence being sufficient, the Beroeans became believers. They, like the Ninevites in the day of Jonah, were willing to be vulnerable, repent, and come into the truth, and that is the fruit of this special grace which God has set aside - that the word which was deposited in His one Catholic Church would be received by the sheep who can hear His voice.

Therefore, in this Petition, we *Cooperate with God* by not rejecting His one Body (Church).

*"Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."*

(Luke 10:16)

## THAT THE CHURCH, WHICH CHRIST JESUS ESTABLISHED THROUGH HIS APOSTLES, IS APOSTOLIC

*"I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."* Cooperating with God is not perfected though the establishment of churches that are not in communion with the one Church community established on the Rock (Kephaz). Inasmuch as the Church that Christ Jesus established through His Apostles is still alive and vibrant today in the Catholic Church, there are and have been many

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<sup>7</sup> Acts 17:10-12

institutions that deign to called themselves *Apostolic*. Christ Jesus did not pray that we would believe in the word of Luther, Calvin, or Wesley! He prayed that we would believe in the word of His Apostles and their successors ( "their word"). How is it that a Protestant church can call itself *Apostolic* if the first Apostles themselves did not found that church or what they are teaching is not what the Apostles actually handed and passed down? It is as true today, as it was when St. Augustine of Hippo wrote it in his 428 C.E. Heresies:

"The Apostolics, who most arrogantly call themselves by that name, do not receive in their communion those who use their spouses and who posses things of their own. The Catholic Church too has such, both monks and most of Her clerics. But these others are heretics, because they separate themselves from the Church and judge that there is no hope to be had for those who use these things which they lack."

The one sheepfold that Christ Jesus spoke of is the Catholic Church and, therefore, when someone organizes a church outside of this one *Apostolic* (sheepfold, communion) they are actually playing the role of thief and robber.<sup>8</sup>

According to its *Apostolic* heritage, Paragraph No. 857 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

"The Church is apostolic because she founded on the Apostles, in three ways:

- she was and remains built on "the foundation of the Apostles,"<sup>9</sup> the witnesses chosen and sent on mission by Christ himself,<sup>10</sup>
- with the help of the Spirit dwelling in Her, the Church keeps and hands on the teaching,<sup>11</sup> the "good deposit," the salutary words she has heard from the Apostles,<sup>12</sup>
- she continues to be taught, sanctified, and guided by the apostles until Christ's return, through their successors in pastoral office: the college of bishops, "assisted by priest, in union with the successor of Peter, the Church's supreme pastor".<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Jn. 10:1.

<sup>9</sup> Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Mt. 28:16-20; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:7-8; Gal 1:1.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Acts 2:42.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. 2 Tim. 1:13-14.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. AG 5.

"You are the eternal Shepherd  
Who never leaves his flock untended.  
Through the Apostles  
You watch over us and protect us always.  
You made them shepherds of the flock To share in the work  
of your Son. . . ."<sup>14</sup>

Whereas, the Aaronic Priesthood of the Old Covenant was sustained through human blood succession, the New Covenant ministerial Priesthood of Christ Jesus has been sustained from the beginning through His perfect Blood in the Catholic Church and the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

"The Apostles, handing on what they themselves had received warn the faithful to hold fast to the traditions which they have learned either by word of mouth or letter,<sup>15</sup> and to fight in defense of the faith handed on once and for all."<sup>16</sup> The true beauty of the nearly two thousand year old Catholic priesthood unfolds in Her ongoing line of Apostolic Succession, as if it were the Poetry of Ordination:

Through the imposition of laying on hands  
deacon is connected to priest and priest to bishop  
and all to each other, in one royal priesthood  
they are all connected to one another  
From generation to generation and from age to age  
even all the way back to when hands were first laid  
upon St. Stephen, St. Philip, Prochorus,  
and Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas,  
and Nicholas of Antioch,<sup>17</sup>  
and to when Christ Jesus, breathed on His first Apostles  
and said, "*Receive the Holy Spirit.*"<sup>18</sup>

The reason why being in communion with the Catholic Church is on the road to perfection is because the Church, being the only Church fully

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Roman Missal*, Preface of the Apostles I.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. 2 Thess. 2:15.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Jude 3, *Dei Verbum*, 11/18/1965.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Acts 6:5.

<sup>18</sup> Jn. 20:22.

within the Kingdom of God, is necessary for those who desire to accept the free gift of Salvation<sup>19</sup> and be in full communion with Christ the King.

What does the Church mean when it says that it is necessary for Salvation? The Church is the Body of the Christ.<sup>20</sup> The Body, being spoken of here is not synonymous with our temporal organism of flesh that withers away over time. On the contrary, when the Christ points to Himself, He is pointing to His total essence that has always existed outside of time and space. Rather, we should say that it is synonymous with our image of God pointing to Himself and saying, "I" (Holy), while He inhales deeply and saying, "Am" (Love), as He fully exhales and extends His arms outward and perpendicular. Christ Jesus repeated the same meaning of those words and actions when He said, "*This is my Body [[(Holy)]]*" and "*This is my Blood [[(Love)]] of the covenant which will be shed for all.*" This is one of the reasons why we call the Church the Bride of the Christ who is Holy and without blemish and why we call Mary the Mother of the Church and why we say that the Church has always existed, because it truly is the living Body of Christ Jesus. The Church is necessary for Salvation because there is no Salvation outside of it. As it is written, "*Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb of God.*"<sup>21</sup>

The Body of Christ Jesus is the *Circle of Grace* into which all are called into. Therefore, to not be in the Body of Christ is to be in the Body of the Devil, which is the *Circle of Hate*, or it is to not exist at all. In other words, in all essence, to reject the Catholic Church is to reject God Himself and His ultimate gift to humanity, which is the Body of Christ Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The Catholic Church, through Her Holy Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance & Reconciliation, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Anointing of the Sick facilitates that unique union between God and dirt being made perfect. Beginning with Baptism, which configures us to the Body of Christ, the Sacraments provide us with a means to draw nearer to that point at the center of the *Circle of Grace*. While the Sacraments do belong solely to God, His providence has also

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<sup>19</sup> CCC 846-847

<sup>20</sup> Eph. 1:22.

<sup>21</sup> Rev. 7:10.

declared that humankind, through their own freewill, draw nearer to Him through the same Church who He has given the authority to officiate them. In this regard, the Catholic Church Herself is a Sacrament of Unity; that is, the perpetual and loving sign of grace, instituted by Christ, by which divine life is dispensed to the people of God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Again, vulnerability is the key to *Cooperating with God* in this Petition. For nearly two thousand years man has thought of Himself to be more righteous than the True Church, the Body of Christ, and to great degrees of failure has he thought this. No protesting community has ever or will ever destroy the Catholic Church. We will discuss in more detail in the next two Petitions why there is *sufficient* grace in the Catholic Church and *insufficient* grace in protesting against the Church. For it is written:

*“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.”* (Acts 2:42)

## ON THE SUFFICIENCY OF GRACE IN THE ONE CATHOLIC CHURCH

*“I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.”* For this Reflection it will be beneficial for you to call to memory our previous reflections on the meaning of the word *Truth*, for it was on this word that God raised His one Church. Let us take another look at St. Peter's confession, as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew (16:13-18):

*“When Jesus went into the region of Caesarea Philippi He asked His disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Kephas said in reply, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus said to him in reply, “Blessed you are, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Kephas, and upon this kephas I will build my Church and the gates of the netherworld will not prevail against it.”*

Because of their overly ambitious attempt to usurp the God given authority of the Catholic Church, every heretical teaching has and *must* redefine the meaning of this passage of sacred Scripture. The meaning here is far from being something esoteric or something that needs professional interpretation.

First, there is the object itself - the rock (Aramaic: *kephas*), which shares the same name that Christ Jesus gave Simon son of Jonah (Aramaic: *Kepha*) (Greek: *Peter*). Together this image represents the fulfillment of the Old Covenant with its one circumcised-ordained (liturgical) royal priesthood (Aaronic bloodline succession) serving one circumcised-non-ordained (common) royal priesthood<sup>22</sup> into one Baptized-ordained (liturgical) royal priesthood (Apostolic succession) serving one Baptized-non-ordained (common) royal priesthood.<sup>23</sup> The Kephass (the Peterine Ministry) represents that steady earthly government, whose house was built upon a solid foundation,<sup>24</sup> who has Christ Jesus as its cornerstone,<sup>25</sup> and which will persevere until the end of the age.

Secondly, the meaning of the word *rock* is a far deeper truth than what it represents here or what the local scenery or clever word play can communicate to us about it. The mystery of this word is revealed in the question that our Lord posed to Simon Kephass, "*But who do you say that I am?*" Yet, as I have already said, because *who* does not substantively answer any questions, what Kephass does is reword the question and tells everyone *what* Jesus of Nazareth is. "*You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.*" It was God who revealed this insightful answer to Kephass, and what God reveals is always *Truth*, just as Satan can only reveal lies. That is to say, that God the Father filled the rock with Truth and, in the presence of the Lord, the rock cried out the Truth, and it is because of this Truth that the Church will never be prevailed against by the Father of lies.

Thirdly, the rock was not filled with the Truth simply because it is Apostolic. On the contrary, it is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, who teaches us everything, guides us to all truth, and reminds us of everything that Christ Jesus revealed to us.<sup>26</sup> This is the reason why, with all

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Ex. 19:6; cf. Isa. 61:6.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. 1 Pet. 2:9; CCC 1268.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Mt. 7:24-27.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-8.

<sup>26</sup> Jn. 14:17; 26, 16:13.



certainty, that the Catholic Church affirms the importance of sacred Tradition in saying, "The Church, in Her doctrine, life, and worship perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that She herself is, all that She believes."<sup>27</sup> For nearly two thousand years, the Catholic Church has disseminated every truth that the Holy Spirit has deposited in Her.

Lastly, it is the Spirit of God who searches the deeper things of God,<sup>28</sup> and it is the Spirit of God who guides all of us to truth.<sup>29</sup> This is why Jesus appointed the Church (the Temple of the Holy Spirit) through the Peterine Ministry to be our fully authentic source of Truth on earth. "You are Kephas [[Rock]], and upon this kephas [[rock]] I will build my Church." This too is why sacred Scripture flows from out of the Church, and why that same Church, from out of which Scripture flows, has always held the authentic (true) interpretation of it, because it is the house of Kephas the Shepherd. This is in contrast with the false interpretations of men, as Jesus demonstrated in His question, "Who do people say that I am?" They replied, "Some say. . . ,” instead of 'The Church teaches'.

These are the reasons why I say that only in the Catholic Church is there sufficient grace for the Salvation that leads to perfection, and this truth is further confirmed by sacred Scripture.

*"But if I should be delayed you should know how to behave in the household of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth." (1 Timothy 3:15)*

*"So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the capstone." (Ephesians 2:19-20)*

*"The wall of the city had twelve courses of stones as its foundation, on which were inscribed the twelve names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb." (Revelation 21:14)*

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<sup>27</sup> CCC 78.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 2:10.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Jn. 16:13.

## ON THERE BEING INSUFFICIENT GRACE IN ALL ORGANIZATIONS OUTSIDE OF THE CHURCH

*"I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word."* This Reflection is connected to the one prior, in that the only Church that is fully within the *Circle of Grace* is the Catholic Church. I do understand how polemic and cold that appears to sound, yet that is the situational nature of this truth.

Every protesting church can be traced back to some man (and most no further back than about five hundred years) who was used by Satan to tempt humanity with *another* choice, and that has led the protesting church to teaching a number of partial truths, which hinder our brothers and sisters on the road to perfection. Also notice how every protesting Church holds some anti-Catholic Church position. For it must hate the True Church because its Father hates everything that God loves. *"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."*<sup>30</sup> The protesting church even avoids loving Mary because the Catholic Church loves her so much and believes in her mediation in Heaven and on Earth. The protesting Church barely even mentions her name outside of their Christmas story plays.

Some wonder why the protesting church now has a favorable position on homosexual clergy, abortion rights for women, gay marriage, and every other popular sin, but the answer is actually very simple; the protesting church was not established on the rock of *Truth*; it *never* contained all of the True teachings of the Apostles, and the Holy Spirit does *not* speak through it. Therefore, it will *always* waiver and collapse to popular opinion. It will always divide and fight against one another and against the Truth. Unfortunately, the truest thing about the protesting church is that it was built on shifting sand.<sup>31</sup>

The true Church is bound to the promissory Covenant issued by God to man, because the goal of every Covenant promise from God is to draw all of humanity to Himself through the Body of Christ. For man to establish a church fully within the *Circle of Grace* he would have to issue a promissory Covenant to God, and that is not how it works. Man cannot draw Himself to God, rather, the finite must be drawn by the Infinite.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Mt. 12:30.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Mt. 7:26.27.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Jn. 6:44.

Promissory Covenants are the predestined means of Salvation for humanity; they are the vehicles that lead us to holiness; they are perpetually moving us only in one direction, which is to true unity with God. To suggest that there is more than one Church in the *Circle of Grace* and the Kingdom of God is to say that there is more than one way, truth, and life, and that just isn't so.

For this very same reason, every other organization outside of the Catholic Church lacks sufficient grace to bring women and men into true relationship with the living God, no matter how noble their mission appears to be. The only organization that Christ Jesus gave humanity as a gift is the Catholic Church. Therefore, every single other organization was initiated by the means and motives of dirt, and the Catholic Church has outlived them all - kingdoms, governments, and fraternal and social clubs alike.

Even Catholic religious orders that have the teachings of the Church, or devotion to Our Lady, or the Sacred Heart at their core, are prone to err in ways that the institutional Church is not. While the Holy Spirit may dwell in the members of such orders, Christ Jesus did not say that the gates of Hell would not prevail against something temporal as a religious order. As invaluable, beautiful, and blessed are our many religious orders - they do not share the same supernatural grace and protection that our Lord prayed for His Church to be blessed with. It is possible for a religious order to be an agent of the Kingdom of Satan. Although it must be said that to the degree that the saints protect the religious order who they are patron of, and to the degree of union that the religious therein have with the Holy Trinity and their Patron Saints, the better off the entire world will be!

Then there are the earthly governments, political parties, schools, charitable organizations, fraternal societies, social movements, and rehabilitation groups - all promising a better world through their self-determinism. Yet, the Holy Spirit does not promise to speak through or protect a single one of them, and neither has God made a covenant with any of them. It is true that Alcoholics Anonymous with its *Serenity Prayer* and higher power god, Secularism with its reason-alone, and the Freemasons with their grand architect of the universe god, do point their members to the *appearance* of a higher good and better life, but only the Catholic Church has consistently pointed humanity to the Holy Trinity who calls all to Salvation and conformity to its will. Indeed, the great

danger of dirt-made organizations is that they lack the indwelling and protection of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, their propensity to lie is likely. Moreover, because they do not have the Peterine ministry, their leadership is not protected in a special way from the Father of lies.

There is something truly peculiar, unique, wonderful, and inspiring about the Catholic Church, which sets it apart from every man-made institution, in that She has, from time immemorial, produced men and women who have successfully responded to the call of holiness - we call these people saints of God. That is to say, that while God does accept all men and women who practice honesty and moral rectitude,<sup>33</sup> including Muslims, Hindus, Buddhist, non-Catholic Christians, and etcetera, it is equally true that He has shown the world a multitude of special graces in His Catholic Church and through Her Sacraments. These graces include, but are not limited to, the perpetual and unbroken life of the Church since the age of the Apostles; the life and continued Heavenly work of thousands of holy saints; the loving mediation of the Blessed Virgin Mother Mary; the real Blood and real Body of Christ Jesus in the Sacrament of the Eucharist; and so many other supernatural occurrences. Once we consider all that God has done and continues to do for and through His one Church, we can truly find no reasons for a Christian to reject the Catholic Church other than a lack of faith and trust in God, disordered pride, and/or intellectual laziness.

So how do we *Cooperate with God* in this Petition? It would be inadequate to say that we must busy ourselves with only the affairs and Sacraments of the Catholic Church, because even in the Church we usually end up on committees and groups that may lack the supernatural protection of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, we must expect the lie to attack every single institution and person on the face of the earth. We prevail over the lie when we are properly disposed to the truth, to the degree that we can always distinguish it from the lie. Let us live in the truth and persevere in it, so that we are able to fight with vigilance to always expose, oppose, and depose every lie that we encounter. More importantly, we must pray for the Catholic Church and all other organizations outside of it - that God will forgive us for our factions and divisions and reunite us back into one Ecclesia. Therefore, we pray for all of humanity to be truly *In Christ*.

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Acts 10:35.

*"Wheresoever the bishop shall appear, there let the people also be: as  
Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church."*

(St. Ignatius letter to the Smyrneans - SSMY 3:4, 107 C.E.)

*"For this love, that we walk according to His commandments; this is  
the commandment, as you heard from the beginning, in which you  
should walk." (2 John 1:6)*

# ~ *Chapter Twelve* ~

## *The Tenth Petition*

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**‘TO BE CATHOLIC’**

**(ONE, WHOLE, HOLY, ALL - UNIVERSAL)**

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### **The Gospel of John Chapter 17:21**

so that they may all be one, as You, Father, are  
in me, and I in You, that they also may be in us,  
that the world will believe that you sent me.

**I** understand why my oldest daughter, Daeleon, has it bad for me, because we were practically inseparable from the hour she was born, but Daerielle, my youngest, I do not get. I went to prison when she was just four years old. She barely has any memories of me before prison. For six years all she knew of me was a Dad who mails her letters, calls her on the phone sometimes, and who she occasionally visits. Yet, sometimes I would catch her just staring at me on visits, and it was as if in that instant of our eyes meeting all of her love for me would pour out of her eyes and into mine. It always made me feel so good that she loved me despite the fact that I could not do the things that I thought earned my children's love.

It may sound odd, but whenever I go to Mass, it is as if the Church looks at me in the same way Daerielle does. I feel that very same goodness in my heart. Both of these are gifts from God. Thank you Jesus! I love you Lesia!

## ON THE INNER WORKINGS OF THE CIRCLE OF GRACE

*“. . . so that they may all be one,”* At the beginning of creation, the Triune God made man in its image and likeness,<sup>1</sup> now, at the hour of the new creation, Christ Jesus prays for man to be empowered to be conformed to His image and likeness again. Just as at the beginning of creation, God breathed into man's nostrils and gave him life, now, at the hour of the new creation, Christ Jesus breathed His life - the life of the Spirit into His Apostles.<sup>2</sup>

From the true center of the point within the *Circle of Grace*, to the outermost fringes of its perfect ring, the only substance, name, reality, energy, and truth that exist in between them is love. Love is the reason why there can be only one Church fully within the *Circle of Grace*, for even as the Apostle St. Paul wrote, *“love does not seek its own interest;”*<sup>3</sup> meaning that it is impossible for there to be divisions, factions, and rivalries where divine love dwells. Christ Jesus prayed that love would make us one, so that we would all be united together in the image and likeness of the Holy Trinity (*“as you Father, are in me and I in you”*).

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gen. 1:26.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jn. 20:21-22.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 13:5.

That is, one family in the *Circle of Grace*. The Church, In Love and Truth, serves as God's visible sign and instrument to make His children one with Him.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord,"<sup>4</sup> He who does not desire in his heart to be like God, in truth desires to be like Satan. 1 John expressed this reality more eloquently than I where it reads, "Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love."<sup>5</sup> It is true that a side affect of being In Christ (in the *Circle of Grace*) is a burning desire to be conformed to the common will of the Holy Trinity and, ultimately, to partake of the Divine Nature of oneness. Divine Love is the most powerful reconciling force in the entire universe. Love heals all things in conformity to the pleasure of God. More will be said later about the effects of living fully within the *Circle of Grace*, but let us first revisit the complete Petition:

***"I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you."***

There is a much deeper perspective of the faith that we must contemplate here. The typology language of the Bible gives us another name to call the apostle (the ones 'sent forth') of God. The apostle is the 'temple of God', which Christ Jesus rebuilt,<sup>6</sup> the one which St. Paul called the dwelling of the Holy Spirit,<sup>7</sup> and the one which the books of Ezekiel and Revelation attest that out of which the living water (love) will flow to nourish all of humanity.<sup>8</sup> The expressed word of the apostle is actually that same living water; that same divine love that the Bereans received and, through which, they were also converted.

The *Circle of Grace* is a spiritual theological term that I will use throughout these series on *Cooperating with God* to describe a very old truth - probably the oldest truths in the universe; that God loves all of His creation and He has provided a perfect abundance of grace to draw all of it into communion with Himself. Those in the *Circle of Grace* are

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<sup>4</sup> Deut. 6:4.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Jn. 4:8.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Jn. 2:19.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 3:16.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Eze. 47:1-12; Rev. 22:1-2.



partakers of the Divine Nature of love through the passion of Christ Jesus and are fully united to the Holy Trinity in every way.

In the late autumn of 2007, my twelve year old daughter Daeleon asked me, “Daddy, how do I know for sure that I am going to Heaven?” While I truly admired her candor and vulnerability in asking me that question, I was also deeply troubled by the human tendency to always want to know the score; who’s winning and who’s losing; who’s in and who’s out. I told my little girl that there will come a time in her relationship with God when she will be so busy trying to help everyone else get to Heaven that she would hardly have the desire or time to consider her own plight until that hour draws itself near. Then I went on to describe to her the type of characteristics of a person who is on the narrow road to Heaven versus a person who is on that wide road to Hell. That same principle holds true here as well.

There is a place that God brings us into relationship with Himself when we know where we are at in the *Circle of Grace* and when we have stepped over to the *Circle of Hate*. It is a definite happy chance to know both good and evil and to be able to discern where your mind, body, and soul are at any given moment, so that you might pray for strength. But instead of telling you how to keep a good score sheet, I will proceed to describe for you the two chief workings of the *Circle of Grace*, both on the Individual and on the pilgrim Church through community, which are to: (1) Purify our Love; and (2) Bring our Mind, Body, and Soul to a Consubstantial state.

In our earlier reflections in chapters Ten and Eleven we discussed this process under the theological term called *justification*, through which the Holy Spirit begins to conform the disciple into the image of Christ Jesus after his or her Adoption of Baptism. In the light of the Three Degrees of the Ascent to Perfection, we could say that the foundational work of this process *begins* in the First Degree of Ascent, *intensifies* in the Second Degree, and is *perfected* in the Third. In this Reflection our language will be much more specific to address exactly how the Holy Spirit wants to conform our substance and nature into the image of God’s only begotten and beloved Son.

Early in the fifth century St. Cyril of Alexandria shared some details about how this process takes place in the *Circle of Grace*, in his *Treasury of the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity*:

"If in being sealed by the Holy Spirit we are reshaped to God, how should the Holy Spirit be creature, when through Him the image of the divine essence is stamped on us, making us, making the seals of increated nature abide in us? For it is not, I suppose, after the fashion of a painter that the Holy Spirit depicts in us the divine essence, as if He Himself were foreign to it; nor is it in this way that He leads us to likeness with God. No, He who is God and who proceeds from God is invisibly impressed, after the fashion of a seal and as if in wax, on the hearts of those who receive Him through communion and likeness with Himself, painting a man's nature again in the beauty of the Archetype, and displaying the man anew according to the image of God."

The Fathers of Vatican II summarized this work of the *Circle of Grace* in this way:

"God, however, does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or like between one another. Rather has it pleased him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges him in truth and serve him in holiness."<sup>9</sup>

We begin with the former work:

### 1. The Purifying of our Love:

The *Gospel of Mark* tells us that there was a scribe who approached the Lord and asked Him, "*Which is the first of all the commandments?*" Whether this scribe was merely trying to obey all six hundred and thirteen precepts or just putting Jesus to the test, we will never know, but what we do know is that our Lord spoke to this man's heart when He replied, "*The first is this: 'Here, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these.*" The scribe then responded in such a way to give evidence that he understood (through faith and reason) what Jesus meant.<sup>10</sup>

Many of us are just like the scribe in this story. We know what the great commandments are and we proceed through our

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<sup>9</sup> Lumen Gentium 9, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican II.

<sup>10</sup> Mk. 12:28-34.

days in a sincere desire to accomplish them; to check them off our 'to do' list. We might perform the ultimate sacrifice and let someone in ahead of us during heavy traffic. We might consul the doubtful or even do the daring - visit someone in prison. These are all noble deeds and surely God smiles upon our efforts, but, despite our efforts, we remain to be just like the scribe - "*You are not far from the Kingdom of God.*"

I tell you the truth, at the point in time in which you accept the greatest commandment as being not a commandment at all, but simply as *who* you are (love), then you will have also moved from being on the fringes to being inside the Kingdom; that is, from just being inside the *Circle of Grace* (the First Degree) to a place very near that point at the center (the Second and Third degrees). God is Holy Love and those who have been adopted by God to be conformed to the image of His Son<sup>11</sup> have also been chosen to matriculate to that same degree of holy perfection.

A soul that is consumed with the love of God does not need to *think* about following any of the commandments or *trying* to be a Good Samaritan. These souls simply act upon the indwelling of the Holy Trinity whose common will drives them to carry out its mission. That mission is to set the world on fire for the Love of God. "*I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing.*"<sup>12</sup>

Our love and the love of the Church for God, neighbor, and self is purified to this height of maturity only through the aid of the Holy Spirit. Right now, even at this very moment, the Holy Spirit is purifying your love, even as you read this book. This is our trust in the mercy of God who desires all of us to come to the knowledge of His immense love.

What the Catholic Church calls sacred Tradition is nothing less than the never-ending work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church and in our personal lives as well; or what we would call experience and maturity. The Holy Spirit takes every single one of our choices, their consequences (both, joy and suffering) and uses them to guide us into a deeper knowledge of the truth.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Rom. 8:28-30.

<sup>12</sup> Lk. 13:49.

For example, there was a time when the Catholic Church thought of Herself to be a land holder, a military force, a cooperator with the state and several other temporal things, but over time the Holy Spirit has continued to purify Her mission in the world. And even the Catholic Church, as we see Her today, will be even more pure and simple in the centuries to come. Every individual who truly burns with desire to be a saint of God will be broken down and rebuilt. That is, recast to be pure and simple (childlike) through the work of the Holy Spirit in them.

Below are some characteristics of pure love that the individual will exhibit in the Second and Third Degrees and which the Church (already perfect) has always exhibited:

- a) Understanding - To have knowledge of who you are in relation to the common will and mission of the Holy Trinity. No longer being an Israelite in nature. The two natures will move from colliding to coinciding. Your will being reconciled to (not with) God's will. That is, the two natures becoming one.
- b) Passion - To no longer engage in seeking self-interest, but only seeking the Beloved. The saints who died in both Corporeal and/or Spiritual Martyrdom had this type of passion, which is rooted in prayer, fasting, and proclaiming the word of God.
- c) Desire - A common trait of all the saints was their burning desire to receive the Body and Blood of Christ Jesus in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. In response, the purified Church also burns with a desire to offer communion and veneration of the Holy Eucharist.
- d) Evidence - According to sacred Scripture, a Church whose love is pure produces the evidence of Her love through self-sacrificing charitable works.<sup>13</sup> She also resembles the description of the true religion, according to the letter attributed to St. James.<sup>14</sup> A purified Church is truly the Body of Christ Jesus, the dwelling of the Holy Spirit, Herself a Holy Sacrament, and the reconciling

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Acts 2:44-45, 6:5-6.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Jas. 1:27.

organism between God and man. As evidence of this special grace, She will always produce and contain holy-penitent members.

2. Bringing our Mind, Body and Soul to a Consubstantial state:

The second great working of the *Circle of Grace*, which occurs within the individual person, is in regards to his/her unity and oneness in the Church. "*But whoever is joined with the Lord becomes one spirit with Him.*"<sup>15</sup> There is a place within the *Circle of Grace* where the Holy Spirit completes its work in conforming the inner person into the likeness of the Holy Trinity. In contrast, there was a time when the disciple's mind, body, and soul were cacophonous and, as a due result, he could not rightly love God, neighbor, and self. This was when his body (flesh) wanted to do things that his mind and his soul did not, or his mind wanted to pursue thoughts that his soul did not want the body to act upon.

The purification of dirt is a work of the Holy Spirit who pours the water of love upon the seed. The roots of the incorruptible seed grows and embraces the dirt, converts it and merges it into one tight mass, so when the Gardener lifts the vine out of the dirt to examine it not one speckle of dirt falls out of the grip of its roots. This new consubstantial person is now able to love with all of his or her mind, body, soul, and strength. Without reason, it loves just for the sake of being in love with the common will of the Holy Trinity.

To arrive at this consubstantial state of holiness is to have matriculated through the two paradoxes of love. First, whereas it was a necessary impossibility to love self without loving neighbor, or to love God without loving self - now, our nature to love as God loves has been maximized, expanded, and perfected through His grace. Secondly, we are now able to properly work out our own Salvation through love of neighbor.<sup>16</sup> That is, this new creation is now able to see everyone and everything through the eyes of God. In Cooperating with God - The Life with the Cross

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<sup>15</sup> 1 Cor. 6:17; Cf. 2 Cor. 4:7-11.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Phil. 2:12.

I briefly spoke about when we develop a love for silence in our mind, body, and soul, how it greatly assists in our advancement to this consubstantial state.

At this harmonic place within the *Circle of Grace*, society also becomes one with God because now all of the persons in the circle are cooperating with the same will. St. Augustine of Hippo, in one of his sermons (circa: 391 to 430 C.E.), expressed the human consubstantial state in this way:

“What the soul is to man’s body, the Holy Spirit is to the Body of Christ, which is the Church. The holy Spirit does in the whole Church what the soul does in all the members of one body.”

Saint Faustina, in entry number 115 of her Diary, wrote about her understanding of the consubstantial state in this way:

“God, as Pure Spirit, introduces the soul to a life which is purely spiritual. God himself has first prepared and purified the soul; that is, He has made it capable of close communion with himself. The soul, in a state of loving repose, communes spiritually with the Lord. It speaks to God without the need of expressing itself through the senses. God fills it with His light.”

Because the Catholic Church is Hypostatic (meaning: both Divine and Human) the responsibility lies heavily on its human component to be the visible face of God on earth. In other words, it devolves upon us to be perfect; to be holy as our Father in Heaven and, as the due result of our visible likeness to God, through us, the world will know that God is real! ***“I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.”***

Holiness attracts holiness and repels evil. We can look to the example of Christ Jesus in the sacred Scriptures for evidence of this fact. Jesus of Nazareth attracted those who truly desired God in their heart and repelled those who loved something other than God. To this day, the image of the Christ on the Cross has the propensity to cause repentant sinners to stammer, gaze, and fall to their knees, while the children of Satan cannot even bare to catch a glimpse of such a perfect expression of Divine Love. Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta was able to

attract so many souls to her mission, not because of any merits of her own, but because of the Holiness of He who dwelt in her.

In that same regard, we Catholics must not be ignorant to think that the administrative and liturgical unity of the Church is enough for the world to believe. On the contrary, each of us must be one (whole, holy, and catholic). Even as the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council stated in their *Decree on Ecumenism*:

“For although the Catholic Church has been endowed with all divinely revealed truth and with all means of grace, Her members fail to live by them with all the fervor they should. As a result, the radiance of the Church's face shines less brightly in the eyes of our separated brethren and of the world at large, and the growth of God's kingdom is retarded. Every Catholic must therefore aim at Christian perfection (cf. Jas. 1:4; Rom. 12:1-2) and, each according to his station, play his part so that the Church, which bears in Her own body the humility and dying of Jesus (cf. 2 Cor. 4:10; Phil. 2:5-8), may daily be more purified and renewed, against the day when Christ will present Her to Himself in all Her glory, without spot or wrinkle (cf. Eph. 5:27).”<sup>17</sup>

In this most divine work, the Holy Spirit sustains the pilgrim Church, already perfect, without spot or blemish in a consubstantial state,<sup>18</sup> thus insuring that Her duties remain inseparable. The duties of the Church are:

- a) To proclaim the word of God (which is the mind of the Church);
- b) To celebrate the Sacraments (which are the soul of the Church - and the Church Herself being a Sacrament of God); and
- c) To exercise the ministry of Charity (which is the Body of the Church).

It is an amazing working of our Holy God that for nearly two millennium the Catholic Church has never deviated from Her duties. On the contrary, over the centuries She has only gotten

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<sup>17</sup> Unitatis Redintegratio 4, Decree on Ecumenism, Vatican II.

<sup>18</sup> Eph. 5:27.

better and will continue to be purified by the Holy Spirit, so that She (the Church) will exercise Her mission through the impartial eyes of the Holy Trinity and facilitate the means through which Her children may increase in holiness by departing from sin.<sup>19</sup>

“All members ought to be molded in the likeness of him, until Christ be formed in them (Cf. Gal. 4:19). For this reason we, who have been made to conform with him, who have died with him and rise with him, are taken up into the mysteries of his life, until we will reign together with him (Cf. Phil 3:21; 2 Tm. 2:11; Eph. 2:6; Col 2:12, etc.)”

*Lumen Gentium 7, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican II.*

## MEDITATIVE POEMS ON THE HOLY TRINITY

### SILENT PRAYER

So I contemplate,

There are things that I do see and feel,  
and there are things that I neither see nor feel,  
the dark cloud,  
the purifying light,  
the unnecessary distractions of the enemy.  
So I pray, ‘God our Father draw me nearer to thee’.

Next, there is that energy that I feel, but do not see.  
So I pray, ‘Christ Jesus transubstantiate my flesh with thees.

Then there is the inner work of grace  
that my senses cannot perceive,  
but through the evidence of faith - I do believe!  
So I pray, ‘Holy Spirit conform my will to thees.

### THE PRESENCE OF THE TRIUNE GOD

Oh, look, there is a stream,  
but where does it begin?  
And there is a river,  
but where does it end?

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*



There is the sun,  
     but when will it dim?  
 Oh, here is the Triune God,  
     who is without beginning or end,  
     whose love for me will never dim,  
     and whose divinity I desire to fully dwell in.

## WHY THE WORLD WILL NOT BELIEVE, UNLESS WE ARE ONE

*“so the world will believe that you sent me.”* The visible unity of the children of God in His One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is the prerequisite that we must achieve through grace, so that all the world can truly believe that Christ Jesus came in the authority of our Heavenly Father. This is the reason why St. Paul lovingly implored the Philippians to *“complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing.”*<sup>20</sup>

Disunity in the Body of Christ is a sin, an unfortunate sign of broken relationship with God, and the due result of having turned a deaf ear to the desires of the Holy Spirit and to this prayer of our Lord. Indeed, disunity in the Body of Christ is a scandal that unbelievers often point to and say, “Look, they worship the same God, but they hate each other. Their own God wants unity, but they love segregation and division. Who are these Christians?” I know this to be true, because I use to say these things about Christians all the time!

Imagine our Lord being scourged at the pillar during His Passion and how those devices of evil tore away the flesh and bones of His body. That very same evil occurs whenever Christians separate themselves from His one Catholic Church, which is the Body of Christ. Over this wound we mourn greatly, and for its healing we fast and pray even more fervently, but all the while remembering that before He gave up His life, our Christ prayed for us to be one and our Father answered that prayer by giving us and continuing to give us all the grace we need to persevere in all catholicity, perfection, and love.

If we could point to the key contributing factor as to why billions of human souls have lived and died with either non-existent or lukewarm

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<sup>20</sup> Phil. 2:2.

faith in the good news of Christ Jesus, it would be because we have failed as a global communion and as individuals to fulfill this one Petition. Even though the Catholic Church has existed in perpetuity since the time of the Apostles, it is equally true that we have not taken full opportunity of the apportioned grace that God has for us to be His one sheepfold.<sup>21</sup>

In some ages, we seemed even afraid to share the good news of fulfillment; that although Christ Jesus ascended to the right hand of His Father in Heaven, He deigned to leave us His one Church (His one Body) with one Priesthood of Apostolic Succession, which fulfilled the one Temple and one Priesthood of bloodline succession. Whereas, in the Temple religion, the presence of God dwelt on an Ark, now we partake of His Real Presence (Body and Blood) in the Holy Eucharist. Whereas before, our relationship with God could only be external, now (through the Holy Spirit) it is both internal and external. Whereas before, we had to eat the flesh of the lamb sacrificed on the altar for the atonement of our sins, now at the sacrifice of the Mass we eat the real Flesh of the *true* Lamb who gave up His life once and for all, so that our sins would be forgiven.<sup>22</sup>

Our brothers and sisters in protest fully know and fully understand, on a purely theoretically level, that God is One and that everything that He has created in the visible and invisible realms were intended to be united to His unique Oneness. Yet, their theoretical knowledge does not always translate into a tangible or driven belief. In light of some of the angels having fallen away from perfect unity with God, it comes to no surprise to us that wounded dirt is oftentimes unable to accept in their heart what they know to be absolutely true. We first encountered the sin of division and factions with the power-hungry Jeroboam I, who separated ten of the Twelve Tribes from their one Temple, one priesthood, and one liturgy in Jerusalem in favor of his self-established shrines, priest, and sacrifices. Just like those thieves and robbers today, who erect vessels of disunity, Jeroboam sought to scatter instead of gather. Whether it be Jeroboam, Arian, Wycliff, Luther, Calvin, or Wesley, ministers of division are always more interested in serving their own needs, rather than the needs of the entire people of God.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Eze. 24:1-16; Jn. 10:16.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Heb. 10:11-14.

To prove that our Lord was praying here for the *visible* unity of His *visible* Church on earth, all we need to do is summarize a few of our previous reflections:

What Did Christ Send Forth (17:18):

It was our Lord Christ Jesus, praying for His Apostles (Greek: *apostolos*, 'ones sent forth'). This prayer had an instant implication for those Twelve men who He had chosen and 'sent forth', as well as *future* implications for all those who Christ would later choose to 'send forth'. In the broadest and most accurate sense, Christ Jesus did not send out individuals for the sake of individuals, but it was the Church who He sent forth for the sake of individuals, commissioning them to make disciples of all nations, Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and of the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup>

Praying for Visible or Invisible Unity? (17:13, 17, 19):

The first clue that we come upon to prove that our Lord expects for His Church to be visibly one is the word 'world'. ***"I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely."*** He is praying here for a tangible and visible reality in a tangible and visible world. The word *world* (Greek: '*kosmos*'), which is being used in the text of this prayer, means 'the orderly arrangement, the world'. Meaning, that in this context of this prayer, our Lord was speaking of the visible world that God created, not the world ('*alon*'), which refers to the Messianic age, as in ". . . the harvest at the end of the world . . ." <sup>24</sup> - nor the world ('*oikoumene*'), which is the known world of man or the world men govern (i.e. the Holy Roman Empire), as in ". . . shall be preached to the whole world . . ." <sup>25</sup>

The next clue that Christ is praying for one Visible Church is found in His triple use of the word 'consecrate'. Consecrate (Greek *hagiazō*, 'to make holy, be, purify, to venerate, hallow, sacred') is used in Scripture to denote a visible object being made Holy, and that which is Holy belongs to Him who is Holy, Holy,

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Mt. 28:19; 2 Macc. 5:19; CCC 767-769.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Mt. 13:39.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Mk. 14:9.

Holy. Some of the visible objects in which the word *hagiazō* is used in conjunction with are gold,<sup>26</sup> individuals,<sup>27</sup> groups of people,<sup>28</sup> a Church,<sup>29</sup> and Old Covenant animal sacrifices.<sup>30</sup> It is also clear from sacred Scripture that *hagiazō* is (1) an operation of God the Father;<sup>31</sup> (2) an operation of God the Son;<sup>32</sup> and (3) an operation of the Holy Spirit through the Blood of Jesus Christ.<sup>33</sup> In other words, it is the Holy Trinity, who sanctifies and guides the visible Church towards visible unity and oneness - conforming Her (the Church) to the image of Christ Jesus.

*Compare and Contrast:*

Even through this brief summarization it is overwhelming clear that Christ our Lord was not praying just for the invisible unity of this Church (but also for its visible unity) when we consider the number of visible objects that He compared His Church to in sacred Scripture; such as: a body, a kingdom, a sheepfold, a bride, a net, a city, flock, sheep, dwelling place, stone, temple, vineyard, olive grove, and a field. In fact, it is rather foolish to think that Jesus gave us a definite task of converting the world and forgiving sins, but not giving us any visible organization with which to accomplish this awesome task in decency and order. Some would say “believe only Scripture” and then completely ignore St. Paul’s instructions on visible Church organization and administration as written in his first letter to St. Timothy.

Satan knows that the human soul cries out for unity and that it is burning with desire to be in one communion with all of creation. From the inception of his hate, the Adversary has fought unwaveringly to keep humanity divided in opposing factions, even dividing small and large

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Mt. 23:17, 19.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Acts 20:32, 26:18; Jude 1.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Rom. 15:16.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 1:2.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Heb. 9:13

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Heb. 2:11.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Heb. 13:12.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. 1 Pet. 1:2.

factions into multiple smaller and larger factions - pitting one race, one gender, and one country against the other. This is who Satan is; it is the food that his tree produces; it is the fruit that Adam and Eve shared, and it is the truth that we have become what our parents ate through the curse of the humanities 'Original Sin.'

Yet, no woman or man has to accept the lie of division. Those who are *In Christ* not only have the victory of Christ Jesus over Satan, but they also have the Sacraments of rebirth (Baptism and Confirmation), consecration (Matrimony and Holy Orders), perseverance (Eucharist, Penance, and Anointing of the Sick) and the special graces of unity allotted through this prayer to keep them in the *Circle of Grace*. In addition, all of humanity has the natural law already written on their hearts that not only tells them to fear God and to love self and love neighbor, but it also instructs them concerning the value of symphonic community.

The natural law, which is present in the heart of each human, is immutable and permanent; regardless of the conditions of time or society. Even when the very principles of natural law are rejected, it cannot be destroyed or removed from the human heart. Paragraph No. 1959 of the *Catechism of the Church* explains it in this way.

"The natural law, the Creator's very good work, provides the solid foundation on which man can build the structure of moral rules to guide his choices. It also provides the indispensable moral foundation for building the human community. Finally, it provides the necessary basis for the civil law with which it is connected, whether by a reflection that draws conclusion from its principles, or by addition of a positive and juridical nature."

Inasmuch as the natural law inspires our conscience to pursue oneness, *Outside* of Christ it is impossible to achieve it, because our passion for true unity has been perverted by the wiles of Satan in various divisive forms. From the Tower of Babel<sup>34</sup> to modern democracy, it is true that our natural desire for unity, which burns in our souls, has been hijacked by Satan to parade about under the guises of nationalism, eugenics, genocide, and exclusive Gnosticism. In addition, all religions, outside of

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Gen. 11:4-6.

that one Church in the Kingdom of God, are also perversions of the common will of the Holy Trinity for us to be one as they are one.

It has been guaranteed by God, through this prayer and by the Blood of Christ Jesus shed on the Cross to sustain the New Covenant, that if the Church is visibly one (meaning: 'one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God, and Father of all')<sup>35</sup> then the world will believe, but it also follows that if we are *not* one, then the world has every right *not* to believe. Who does not grasp this Divine concept? Who is not ready to sacrifice his/her pride and undo the works of Satan? There is not a question that I get asked more frequently than, "Why are Christians divided?" In *The Catholic Church has the Answer*, Paul Whitcomb answered these questions in this way:

"Catholics believe that theirs is the one True Church of Jesus Christ, firstly, because theirs is the only Christian Church that goes back in history to the time of Christ; secondly, because theirs is the only Christian Church which possesses the invincible unity, the intrinsic holiness, the continual universality and the indisputable apostolicity which Christ said would distinguish His True Church; and thirdly, because the Apostles and primitive Church Fathers, who certainly were members of Christ's True Church, all professed membership in this same Catholic Church (see Apostles' Creed and the Primitive Christian letters). Wrote Ignatius of Antioch, illustrious Church Father of the first century: "Where the Bishop is, there let the multitude of believers be; even as where Jesus is, there is the Catholic Church." Our Lord said: "There shall be one fold and one shepherd", yet it is well known that the various Christian denominations cannot agree on what Christ actually taught. Since Christ roundly condemned inter-denominationalism (*"And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand."* Mk. 3:25). Catholics cannot believe that He would ever sanction it in His Church."

The main reason why I (as an agnostic/deist) did not believe that *Christians* were the people of God is because I knew that the God of the Bible is one and that He had always kept His people together (as one, like Him). Even though, at that time, I thought that the Catholic Church was just another Christian denomination, much later it was my happy chance to be led to the truth.

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<sup>35</sup> Eph. 4:5-6.

As far as solutions go, especially concerning the problem of the protesting Church, I suggest only two things: First that we turn all of our thoughts and energies to the virtues of vulnerability and humility; and second, that every single one of us ask God in prayer to direct us along the path to sainthood, because the more saints that we have on earth and in Heaven the better off the Kingdom, the Church, the communion, and the world will be.

*“May the God of peace Himself make you perfectly holy and may your entire spirit, soul, and body, be persevered blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and He will also accomplish it.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

*“So there are three that testify, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and the three are of one accord.”* (1 John 5:7-8)





# SECTION FOUR

VESSELHOOD  
(FAITH, HOPE & LOVE)

# ~ *Chapter Thirteen* ~

## *The Eleventh Petition*

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### **‘TO RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT’**

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#### **The Gospel of John Chapter 17:22-23**

And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me.

*"I don't care what anybody says, he don't have the Holy Spirit."* I once heard a self-proclaimed Christian say that about someone. Hearing those words greatly upset me and after I admonished him for his unedifying words he said, *"Well, you know a tree by its fruit."* This is true, but does it not take at least three years for a pear tree to produce good fruit? If you believe that someone does not have the Holy Spirit is it better to talk about his lack thereof or to pray that he receives it?

I once heard a wise priest describe the Holy Spirit as being like that person on the sidelines who roots us on as we compete - *"You can do it!" "Keep it up!" "Faster!" "Pace yourself!"* I enjoy that image of the Holy Spirit very much, because God is a God of empowerment. He not only tells us to be like Him, but goes out of His way to lovingly offer us every help and opportunity for us to achieve the goal He set for us.

My favorite image of the Holy Spirit comes from the eighteenth chapter of the book of *Jeremiah*. In that chapter, God likens Himself to being a Potter and us the clay who He molds by His hands into whatever object He so pleases. I like to think of myself as being an ugly lump of deformed clay sitting in God's workshop for over thirty years. Each year that I sat on the shelf I became harder, dryer, and uglier. Then, at the moment of my Baptism, God put me on His wheel, poured the water of the Holy Spirit on me, and began to create a masterpiece out of what had previously been difficult and atrocious to even glance at. I see myself today as still spinning on the wheel of life, with God carefully shaping me with His loving hands into the image of His beloved and begotten Son - pouring more and more water into me whenever I start to get hard.

God, thank you for being my God! I need you more and more, everyday! I love you!

## A SHORT TREATMENT ON THE LIGHT & THE GOODNESS OF GOD

*"And I have given them the glory you gave me . . ."* Our comprehension of the word *glory* is crucial to our understanding of the present and forthcoming reflections on the fruits of the Third Degree of the Ascent to Perfection - to which this section is primarily geared.

We will begin by reading some of the most revealing passages out of sacred Scripture that describes the meaning of the glory of God. Here, as in previous instances, an elongated study of the Aramaic (*kabod*) and Greek (*dox*) language equivalents of the English word *glory* are without significant fruit, so we proceed to read the text: “*Then Moses said, “Do let me see your glory!” He answered “I will make all my beauty pass before you, and in your presence I will pronounce my name, ‘YHWH’; I who show favors to whom I will, I who grant mercy to whom I will! But my face you cannot see, for no man sees me and still lives.”*<sup>1</sup> God is Holy-Good and the glory of God is His Holy manifested goodness; that is, His Holy-good, Holy-pleasing, and Holy-perfect will<sup>2</sup> that is evident within the *Circle of Grace* is distinct from His permissive will, which *tolerates* the conflicting will of dirt and Satan.

The face of God, which His intimate friend had seen before and was now asking to see again, is His *full* manifested goodness, and that expression of glory cannot be revealed to sinners. This point the *Psalms* make abundantly clear through repetition, and it is also summated perfectly by St. Paul in his letter to the Church of Rome: “*all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God.*”<sup>3</sup> That is, because of the pitiful condition of our nature and substance *Outside* of Christ, God cannot bare to look at us and we cannot bare the pain of such a Holy event. So it was mercy that God showed Moses when He kept His full glory hidden after Moses had offered himself as a sacrifice for the Israelite’s sin of idolatry.<sup>4</sup>

The distinctions of God’s glory that I have made thus far have been between the glory of God, which is His manifested goodness through the expression of accessible light, and the *full* glory of God, which is His manifested goodness through the expression of inaccessible light. Both of these lights are divine energies, which spring only from one source. Let us develop the related meanings of *light* and *glory* even further through the following Scriptures:

*“A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through Him. He was not the light, but*

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<sup>1</sup> Exo. 33:18-20.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Rom. 12:2.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. 3:23; Cf. Hab. 1:13.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Exo. 33:30-34:23.

came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."<sup>5</sup>

"Jesus said to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."<sup>6</sup>

"And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil."<sup>7</sup>

This is the great mystery, that the second person of the Trinity, Christ Jesus, who was begotten in the exact image (substance) and nature (likeness) of His Father - God from God, Light from Light, True God from True God,<sup>8</sup> came down from Heaven, was born of a woman, took on flesh, so that those who could not previously approach the True Light might now do so through His death. "Because He Himself was tested through what He suffered, He is able to help those who are being tested"<sup>9</sup>

This mystery deepens further still; first, God did not have to make His glory accessible to us, but He did so because He is Holy Love and He loves His creation. Second, the full glory of God came, looked upon us and we did not die, but, instead, we were given the means to be new creations *In Christ* through Baptism. This paradox is too much for us to wrap our minds around once we consider the full breath of it all. Christ Jesus, both God and man (without contradiction or confusion) was the full glory of God and manifested for the Salvation of man through the Baptism of death.

Lastly, I would like to relate the glory of God to the meaning of His name. Every energy of God is directed from His substance (Holy) and His nature (Love). That is, when we are discussing God's patience, we now call it His Holy-Loving Patience, or when we speak of His anger, we now call it His Holy-Loving Anger. Yet, when we speak of His manifested goodness (His Glory) we are not referring to a type of projected energy, but to the actual essence of the energy itself. It is comparable to the equal sign in a mathematical problem or to the

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<sup>5</sup> Jn. 1:4-9.

<sup>6</sup> Jn. 8:12.

<sup>7</sup> Jn. 3:19.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Nicene-Constantinople Creed; cf. Heb. 1:3.

<sup>9</sup> Heb. 2:18.

conveyor belt upon which patience or anger (types of energy) would be conveyed. This is why all things that come from God are good and why we call God good. For, by the singular virtue of His name, God can be and do nothing less.

*“Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wonderful deeds. Blessed be His glorious name forever; may all the earth be filled with the Lord’s glory. Amen and amen.”* (Psalm 72:18-19)

*“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth. Try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the fruitless works of darkness; rather expose them, for it is shameful even to mention the things done by them in secret; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says: “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.”* (Ephesians 5:8-14)

## HOW DOES THIS GLORY LEAD US TO PERFECTION

*“so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfect as one;”* As I ever so briefly stated in Chapter One, while it is true that God has called all humans to Salvation, but only perfects some of the Baptized, it would be an error (on our part) to assume that God does not expect all of us, His adopted children, to be conformed to the image of His Holy Son. God would love nothing more than for all of us to be in a uniquely loving and Holy relationship with Him.

This Petition is yet another example of Christ Jesus asking us not to perform the impossible, but to perform the possible *with* His assistance. *“So be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.”*<sup>10</sup> I also stated that the work of perfecting man (making him whole/perfectly catholic) belongs to God, like consecration, it is a completely independent work of God. In other words, dirt cannot make *anything* Holy, but only the author of all Holiness makes whatever He so desires to be Holy.

They ask, ‘How can we respond to the expectation of being perfect if God will not micromanage our spiritual life?’ I answer that timely

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<sup>10</sup> Mt. 5:48.

question in this way: There is a point within the *Circle of Grace* where those who have successfully *Cooperated with God* in their daily conversion (justification) are called into a more complete union with the Holy Trinity. The grace of God has already made it possible for all of us to always say 'Yes' to Him and 'No' to Satan, and it is by this free ascent into the common will of the Trinity through which we arrive at that particular point from which we can be chosen for the work of perfection. In the language of this book we can identify that particular starting point, where there are disciples who never say 'No' to God, as being somewhere near the fringes of the Third Degree.

Because our Mother Mary was free from humanities' 'Original Sin' from the very moment of her conception,<sup>11</sup> she came into the world already at the particular point within the *Circle of Grace* of which I speak. She was born as a perfect human; born whole and consecrated from the beginning. That is, uncorrupted dirt, full of grace<sup>12</sup> and progressing to be in an even *more* holy relationship with God. The holiness of the Blessed Mother allows us to look at her life and see what perfect says, what it does, and what it does not do. In Mary we come to understand that perfect is vulnerable and always loves God, neighbor, and self completely. Perfect may not always understand the common will of the Trinity, but it always cooperates (in love) with the will that it always burns with passion to be in union with. She said, "*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.*"<sup>13</sup>

The further that we are away from that point at the center of the *Circle of Grace* the less likely that we may have the courage, the desire, or the will to always say 'Yes' to God and 'No' to Satan. Yet, again I say, the grace to always say 'Yes' to God is abundantly available, and the more that we say 'Yes' to His will the stronger and better our relationship with Him will be. Christ Jesus truly desires to make His Bride perfect and we must *Cooperate with His* desire by fighting for this marriage. Never quit; never surrender; be saints! This must be the attitude of not only the disciple, but for the entire Church as well. "*So be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect.*"<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Dogma of the Immaculate Conception (CCC 491).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Lk. 1:28.

<sup>13</sup> Lk. 1:38.

<sup>14</sup> Mt. 5:48.

## FROM GLORY TO GLORY

*“so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may be brought to perfect as one;”* We are in the process of becoming one with God and holy ourselves because the Holy-Glory of God that dwells in us. There are two ways in which the Holy-Glory of God comes to make its home with us, and to lead us to perfection. The first way is immediate and the second is mediated.

Concerning the first way, when we receive the Holy Spirit through the Sacrament of Baptism, or at whatever time God appoints, God Himself (without any mediation) fully becomes integrated into our human personhood of mind, body, and soul. This prayer of Christ Jesus, and His sacrificial death on the Cross, made it possible for the inaccessible Glory of God to actually come and dwell in His creatures. That is, it was Calvary that made it possible for God to be one with His creatures and also facilitated the means through which God could share His life (the Divine Nature) with them.

In the Tenth Petition (*to Be Catholic*) I addressed how it is that our mind, body, and soul are brought from a cacophonic state to a symphonic state through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit (the Love of the Triune God in us) is always actively in the process of making us holy and one with God.

*“I in them and you in me.”* If you have received the Holy Spirit, it is vitally important for you to affirm and reaffirm yourself in this divine reality, that God is truly *In* you and that you are truly *In* Christ. Say to yourself, throughout the day, “God is in me.” In addition, frequently minister to yourself, especially during times of trial, temptation, or desolation, that the God *In* you is Greater than you and can conquer whatever you are going through.

To address the second way in which God comes to dwell in us, I must first revisit the meaning of the word *glory* and explain how it impacts our desire to be saints: The full glory of God the Father became inaccessible at ‘*the Fall*’ of man, but was made accessible again through the divine humanity of Christ Jesus. Yet, when our Lord ascended to His Heavenly throne at the right hand of the Father, His Real Presence did not leave us. The full glory of God remained with us in the *Parousia* (presence) of the Body of Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist, through which we happily proclaim that Christ has Come, Christ Comes, and Christ will Come again. Through the transubstantiation of



Bread and Wine into the Body and Blood of Christ Jesus, God made it possible for sinful man to gaze upon His full glory and not die - *"take and eat; this is my Body . . . Drink from it, all of you, for this is my Blood of the Covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins."*<sup>15</sup>

As a direct result of our remembrance<sup>16</sup> at the Sacrifice of the Mass, we not only see the full glory of God, but we renew our marriage vows through this most intimate act. *"Oh taste and see the manifested goodness of the Lord."*<sup>17</sup> As the people of God open their mouths to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord, He enters and becomes fully apart of their bodies in a very Holy and unique way. *"that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me."* Effectively, the entire Church becomes one through the Sacrament of the Eucharist. It is true that we are one in body and spirit through the Catholic Church, one in hope through our discipleship, one in Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and one in our love for the Triune God. It is equally true that we are one in faith in believing that the actual Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ Jesus is present under the appearance of Bread and Wine in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Through the miracle of the transubstantiation we truly know that God sent His Son, that He continues to send Him, and that He will send Him again. Through this Sacrament we tremble at the Holy-Loving Mercy of God - the same God whose *Parousia* called Moses to remove his sandals.<sup>18</sup> We gaze upon the beauty of the Bridegroom as we wait in line to receive Him. We do not approach Him with unrepentant sins in our hearts, but we do approach Him in complete joy. Then the moment comes, and what a happy chance for our tongues, but who at that moment has not considered the consequences or feel completely humbled, ashamed, and/or unworthy that Christ Jesus is about to enter their temple? *"Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed."*<sup>19</sup> We ask ourselves 'Will He be pleased with my temple?' At that moment there are two things that I hope for the most: (1) That every person in the world would share in the joy of being one in

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<sup>15</sup> Mt. 26:26-28.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Lk. 22:19; Jn. 14:26.

<sup>17</sup> Ps. 34:9.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Exo. 3:5.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Mt. 8:8.

communion today; and (2) That Christ Jesus would transubstantiate my body and blood for Thees.

*“I am speaking as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I am saying. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the Blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the Body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, through many are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.”*

(1 Corinthians 10:15-17)

## FAITH THAT WORKS

Our cooperation in this Petition is a matter of living in complete faith with God and Him having faith in us. I do not write these words lightly. True trust in God must be a mutual affair. For, to have *incomplete* faith in God is to not trust Him in every aspect of your life. It is to be vulnerable to God in some matters, but not in all. It is to open up your heart only *partially* to the good, pleasing, and perfect common will of the Triune God.

Indeed, the expectation of being perfect is scary! We only have to look at the rich young man to partially understand the depths of what it means to trust God completely through the permanent sacrifice of our will in favor of His. “Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell all you have to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven. Then come follow me.”<sup>20</sup> The actions of the young man in this story stand in stark contrast with the actions of the young Elisha who, when called by Elijah, promptly gave away all of his worldly possessions and attachments.<sup>21</sup> While it is true that not everyone responds to the call of holiness as promptly as others do, it is equally true that souls in the Third Degree of the Ascent to Perfection have forsaken the desire to possess anything in this world. It may be the case that this man eventually did acquiesce and sell all of his property to the poor and became a disciple of Christ, but sacred Scripture is silent on that question. Yet, what we do know is that at that particular moment, the rich young man was saddened at the prospect of having to sell all of his worldly possessions. Unfortunately, he is just like so many other people throughout the ages in misplacing

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<sup>20</sup> Mt. 19:21.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. 1 Kgs. 19:19-21.

their love and faith in temporal goods and affairs. Some have wondered why Jesus did not tell the rich young man to just *give away* all of his possessions to the poor, rather than *selling* them. This question does have some merit, but the answer is actually very simple; God knows each man's and woman's heart; He knows exactly what each one of us needs *in* or *out* of our life, and He also knows the best way to get it out of our life, so that we might be able to properly respond to His loving grace in a deeper way. God's commands are always what is simultaneously best for Him, us, and neighbor.

The danger of faith is in believing that it is enough, in and of itself, to merit Salvation and/or in believing that faith-driven works creates a Heavenly debt, which God will remit payment for at the hour of our death. It is essential to understand the fact that both faith and works belong solely to God. That is, when our faith and works are true, they are first His doing and only our *Cooperating with His* doing. Remember, God moved first. In this way, all works are the fruits and due result of our vesselhood. Jesus is the leader, author, and perfecter of faith,<sup>22</sup> and He sent the Holy Spirit to guide each woman and man along that road (*The Life with the Cross*). As the Holy Spirit guides the disciple of Christ along the ascent to perfection, he or she will come to a place within the *Circle of Grace* where a portion of his/her heart is transubstantiated for a portion of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Whereas in the previous Degrees, the disciple could only sympathize with the needs of the poor, neglected, and oppressed, now in the Third Degree he finds that his soul burns with great mourning and passion to offer himself as a sacrifice for those in need. Indeed, true faith goes far beyond just wanting to *assist* the poor, neglected, and oppressed to actually *being* a living sacrifice *for* them. In fact, faith is only real to the degree that it is driven and propelled (through the process of justification) to offer works of mercy<sup>23</sup> and to ease the misery of neighbor

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Heb. 12:2.

<sup>23</sup> The **Seven Corporal Works of Mercy** are (1) Feed the hungry; (2) Give drink to the thirsty; (3) Clothe the naked; (4) Shelter the homeless; (5) Visit the sick; (6) Visit the imprisoned; and (7) Bury the dead. The **Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy** are (1) Counsel the doubtful; (2) Instruct the ignorant; (3) Admonish sinners; (4) Comfort the afflicted; (5) Forgive offenses; (6) Bear wrongs patiently; and (7) Pray for the living and the dead (CCC 2447). Cf. Mt. 25:31-34; Acts 9:4.

for the love of God. It is at this point within the *Circle of Grace* where faith begins to get real. When God the Father destines us to be conformed to the image of His Son,<sup>24</sup> He intends for us to love on creation just as His only begotten and beloved Son did and does.

Some will now recall our Reflections on how *justification* leads to perfection and say, 'Are we not justified by faith, just as the Apostle Paul wrote?'<sup>25</sup> I answer that by saying, both faith and works are expressions of love and God is love. Again I say, works and faith belong solely to God whose grace *allows* and *propels* His creatures to bear the fruit of faith and works. Therefore, in broader language than St. Paul, I say that it is not by faith, but rather by God alone that we are justified.

"If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him?"<sup>26</sup> In the Second Petition (*to Obey the Word of the Father*) I said that the only way that we can keep what God has freely given us is by giving it away just as freely. Yet, what is given away is only given rightly when it is given back to God and neighbor. Faith is real only to the degree that we cooperate with the Holy Spirit's desire to glorify God by giving God and neighbor what rightly belongs to them. The religious who take vows of poverty understand this teaching better than most - that the disciple of Christ does not rightly possess any 'thing'. Therefore, spiritually speaking, we can say that to possess any 'thing' would be to possess God and that is impossible.

When the Holy Spirit glorifies God through us, it is called a 'work of mercy'. Works of mercy are part of the process of justification and, because of their contributing effect on a soul's purgation, they can only be offered by Disciples of Christ (the adopted/Baptized); those within the *Circle of Grace*. These expressions of our faith and works follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit and the great command to love God, neighbor, and self, and they always positively affect all three persons of our love.

The reason why the process of justification begins with faith and why works can never be independent of faith is because the first work that God's grace demands from the soul is giving back to God the faith that

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Rom. 8:28-30.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Rom. 5:1.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Jn. 3:17.

He gave it. That is, we give our faith back to God when we first come to the knowledge of our sins and repent of them. We are freed from sin, because Christ freed us from it around 33 C.E. on the Cross, and not because of any merits on our own. We faithfully give our sins up to God, trusting that He will take them and heal our soul. This first work of repentance leads to the second work of Baptism, through which the Holy Spirit glorifies God again and promises to continue to bring glory to Him as He moves to conform us into the image of Christ Jesus. Our repentance and Baptism are works, because it is the Holy Spirit that compels and empowers the soul to *Cooperate with God* in these free ascents to His will, and through them our Eternal Father is glorified.

By cooperating with the Holy Spirit in the process of justification, through Corporal and Spiritual works of mercy, our faith and works continue to bring glory to God, glory to God's love for our neighbor, and glory to our soul, which is being conformed to the image of His Son. Again, real faith and works always positively affects all three persons of our love.

When we allow the Holy Spirit to work through us by loving on those whom God desires to immerse into His ocean of mercy, it is one of the highest expressions of *Cooperating with God* that there is for the human soul. And when we open ourselves up to be God's vessels of mercy, He responds by showing us more mercy, and when we obey His promptings to offer His love to our neighbor, He responds by showering us with even more love. This is why the epistle, bearing the name of St. James, said that works of mercy are a vital element in the process of justification and why he said that works of mercy can save the soul.<sup>27</sup> Christ Jesus said, "*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for those he loves.*"<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the Holy Spirit works to purify the soul of Christ's disciples and propels them to offer themselves up for Spiritual and Corporeal Martyrdom.

These last three Petitions of Christ Jesus' Bridegroom Prayer truly embraces the alpha and omega of our *Life with the Cross*, and it all begin with this Petition, "***I have given them the glory you gave me.***" That is to say, that He gave us the means to be glorified, to love rightly, and to become visibly one with Him, through the work of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Jas. 2:14,24.

<sup>28</sup> Jn. 15:13.

If you have already been Baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, then you have already rightly cooperated. What remains to be done is for you to give up all - all of yourself to God as Christ Jesus did and follow Him to the Cross. *"If you wish to be perfect, go, sell all you have to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven. Then come follow me."*<sup>29</sup>

How to live our lives in complete trusting faith in God is the meditative teaching of the Rosary Prayers first Glorious Mystery - the Resurrection.

*"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me . . . Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."* (Matthew 25:35-36 . . . 40)

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<sup>29</sup> Mt. 19:21.

# ~ *Chapter Fourteen* ~

## *The Twelfth Petition*

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### **‘TO PERSEVERE INTO HEAVEN’**

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#### **The Gospel of John Chapter 17:24**

Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

What greater hope is there than to hope for eternal life - both now and forever? There is none! I know in Heaven that there are no greater joys than experiencing the beatific vision and simply dwelling in the full presence of God. Yet, sometimes, I find myself wondering if I will still be able to enjoy my four favorite foods (pizza, pomegranates, cashews, and doughnuts) when I get there. This little hope of mine may disappoint me in the end, but St. Paul writes about a hope and a path to eternal life that never disappoints.<sup>1</sup>

## A SHORT TREATMENT ON PERSEVERANCE

*"I wish that where I am they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me . . ."* The first hope of every saint is that the Kingdom of God will come and that His will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.<sup>2</sup> Even if our understanding is but only partial, we rejoice in the Triune nature and *Parousia* of the revealed Kingdom of God, through which we express our three hopes in His coming. The three senses of the Kingdom of God are as follows:

1. The Divine Kingdom - In the first sense, we see Christ the King and the Body of Christ as the one perfect Kingdom, but through Him we see the one to whom He points; the one source of all things; the Ancient of Days, who gave His only begotten and beloved Son the authority to reign as King over all His people. And we wait and Hope in joyful expectation, when all who belong to Christ enters His Body and when all who oppose truth are destroyed, at which point He will hand the reign back over to His Father and the Kingdom will come into its full glory (manifested goodness), and then we shall see His face.<sup>3</sup> This Kingdom, which belongs to God the Father, has come to reconcile all of humanity into one loving communion with God, and this eternal Kingdom (without end) will come again.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Rom. 5:1-5.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Mt. 6:10.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 15:20-25.



Therefore, our Hope is not well placed in the Kingdom coming, because the doors of the Kingdom have been open ever since the New Covenant Seder was celebrated and the Kingdom remains accessible to us through the Sacraments of the Church. On the contrary, our great Hope and prayer is that all of humanity will recognize the Kingdom as the great gift from God that it is and come partake in its divine union and presence.

2. The Human Kingdom - In the second sense of the Kingdom of God, we again see the second person of the Trinity (Christ Jesus), who in the first sense of the Kingdom of God points to the Father, but now points to each of us. *"Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him."*<sup>4</sup> This axiom is what the Lord was referring to in His prayer, where He said, ***"I wish that where I am they may be also."*** He is in the Father and they (those who are In Him) are in the Kingdom. In other words, the person of Christ, the persons In Christ, and the Church of Christ all belong to the Kingdom of God.

Whoever believes that God has come to dwell in the unconsecrated has seriously misunderstood the expectations of God! For God became human, so that humans too might properly respond to His love, and those who do properly respond to His love He also consecrates, and those whom He consecrates He also dwells in.<sup>5</sup> It is even as St. Augustine of Hippo wrote, **"He operates that we may will; and when we will, He cooperates that we may perfect."**

This Holy indwelling of God, which our Mother Mary received in a most unique way, also comes to us in the Holy Eucharist, but spiritually to all of us through a pure heart. The pure of heart who will see the face of God<sup>6</sup> are also the poor in spirit (the vulnerable children of God) whose inheritance is the same Kingdom.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jn. 14:23.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Jn. 10:33-38.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Mt. 5:8.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Mt. 5:3.

Each person *In Christ* is the Kingdom of God because Christ the King dwells in each and every one of them, and the Kingdom is wherever the King is. Persons *In Christ* are the vessels of God that He uses accordingly to share His goodness towards all of creation. As long as we remain *In Christ* (which is nearer that point in the center of the *Circle of Grace*) He will always effect His Kingship through us. “*And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.*”<sup>8</sup>

***“that they may see my glory.”*** It has been revealed to the saints that through pure vesselhood we can enjoy a front row seat to see the glory of God.

3. The Hypostatic Kingdom - In the last sense of the Kingdom of God we again see Christ Jesus, who now points to the third person of the Holy Trinity (the Holy Spirit), “*the temple of the living God,*”<sup>9</sup> who was sent to guide us towards all truth through His Church.<sup>10</sup>

The fullness of the loving reasons why God established the Primacy of His Son and the Ministry of Reconciliation are manifested and exemplified through the work of the Holy Spirit in the Hypostatic Kingdom. It is the Spirit of God that guides all those who *Cooperate with God* through the *Life with the Cross*. St. Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, explained the work of the Hypostatic Kingdom in this way:

*“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the Blood of Christ. For He is our peace, He who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through His Flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that He might create in Himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the Cross, putting that enmity to death by it.”*<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Mt. 28:20.

<sup>9</sup> 2 Cor. 6:16; Cf. 1 Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 2:21.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Jn. 14:15-17, 25, 16:13; 1 Tim. 3:15.

<sup>11</sup> Eph. 2:13-16.

As we have already discussed in some detail, there is only one Church, which was established by Christ Jesus through His Apostles, and it is in that most Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church where the Holy Spirit dwells, teaches, and manifests the goodness of God.<sup>12</sup> The Catholic Church is the Living Image of the Kingdom of God and those in the Catholic Church fulfill this Petition, because they are where Christ the King uniquely is and they see His glory in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

The common will of the Trinity is for “everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.”<sup>13</sup> To accomplish this eternal goal the Father sent His Son,<sup>14</sup> and the Son sent the Holy Spirit,<sup>15</sup> and the Holy Spirit sends out the apostles with every gift and charism needed to build up the Church.<sup>16</sup> Paragraph No. 798 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains the work of the Holy Spirit within the Kingdom of God in this way:

“The Holy Spirit is “the principle of every vital and truly saving action in each part of the Body.”<sup>17</sup> He works in many ways to build up the whole Body in charity.<sup>18</sup> by God’s Word “which is able to build you up”;<sup>19</sup> by Baptism, through which he forms Christ’s Body;<sup>20</sup> by the sacraments, which give growth and healing to Christ’s members; by “the grace of the apostles, which holds first place among his gifts”,<sup>21</sup> by the virtues, which make us act according to what is good; finally, by the many special graces (called “charisms”), by which he makes the faithful “fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church.”<sup>22n</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Eph. 2:19-22.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. 1 Tim. 2:3.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Jn. 3:16-21.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Jn. 14:15.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Eph. 4:11.

<sup>17</sup> Pius XII, encyclical, *Mystici Corporis*: DS 3808.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Eph. 4:16.

<sup>19</sup> Acts 20:32.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 12:13.

<sup>21</sup> Lumen Gentium 7 § 2.

<sup>22</sup> Lumen Gentium 12 § 2; cf. AA 3.

We not only see the glory of God in the Church, through the sacraments, charisms, and the holy saints, but we also see it through sacred Tradition. Our Canon of sacred Scripture is the most precious deposit of Tradition and it fully attests to the glory of God. The manifested goodness of God is also evident in the perpetual life of the Church. Christ Jesus prayed that through it (the Hypostatic Kingdom) we would always be one, and it is so. He said the gates of Hell would never prevail against it,<sup>23</sup> and it is so.

The Holy Spirit is fully God and the whole Catholic Church is full of the penitent and perishing. Yet, it is through this merciful relationship that we can come to fully contemplate the mystery of the hypostatic union - that the union of the Divine Nature of Christ Jesus (as God) with His human nature (as man) remains ever-present in the Catholic Church where there are also two natures; one divine (Holy Spirit) and one human (man and woman) without contradiction or confusion. That is, rather than the Holy Spirit bestowing His hypostasis upon the Church, He has chosen to work through those who desire to *Cooperate with God*. In this way, the Church is able to simultaneously be both a divine and human institution.<sup>24</sup>

This understanding and respect of our hypostatic union with God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, is what has guarded and blessed the decisions of every Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church, and what our Apostolic Fathers were referring to in their letter to the Church at Antioch, "*It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities.*"<sup>25</sup> Below, is the prayer, which the council Fathers prayed during the Second Provincial Council of Seville, Spain, the 619, the Fourth Provincial Council of Toledo, Spain in 633, the First Vatican Council in 1869, and before every meeting (in Latin) of preparatory and conciliatory commissions of the Second Vatican Council, between 1962 and 1965:

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Mt. 16:18.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Eph. 1:17-23.

<sup>25</sup> Acts. 15:28.

"We are here before You, O Holy Spirit, conscious of our innumerable sins, but united in a special way in Your Holy Name. Come and abide with us. Deign to penetrate our hearts.

Be the guide of our actions, indicate the path we should take, and show us what we must do so that, with Your help, our work may be in all things pleasing to You.

May You be our only inspiration and the overseer of our intentions, for You alone possess a glorious name together with the Father and the Son.

May You, who are infinite justice, never permit that we be disturbers of justice. Let not our ignorance induce us to evil, nor flattery sway us, nor moral and material interest corrupt us. But unite our hearts to You alone, and do it strongly, so that, with the gift of Your grace, we may be one in You and may in nothing depart from the truth.

Thus, united in Your name, may we in our every action follow the dictates of Your mercy and justice, so that today and always our judgments may not be alien to You and in eternity we may obtain the unending reward of our actions. Amen."

The Kingdom of God is now at hand and has always been at hand in the One Body of Christ Jesus, to which the Holy Trinity draws all of humanity into itself to carry out its will on earth.

*"I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 1:6)

*"Glory be to God the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, it now and forever shall be. World without end.  
Amen."*

## LIVING IN HOPE

Throughout the pages of sacred Scripture this principle constantly reverberates without error; that before the people of God can build or even rebuild the Lord's Temple (God's dwelling place), He (God) must first deliver them from their enemies. This was the sequence of events in the Sinai desert, after the Lord God had delivered the children of Israel from the Egyptians and Amalek, and until His presence could come to

rest in the Tabernacle.<sup>26</sup> This was also the case for King Solomon who God allowed to build the Temple only because his father, King David, had already defeated the kingdom's enemies.<sup>27</sup> Even before Nehemiah and the Israelites were able to complete the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls, they first had to deal with the opposition of their enemies: the Sanballats, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites.<sup>28</sup> It also holds true that before Judas Maccabeus and his brothers were given the grace to purify the Temple, they first had to overcome their enemies: Nicanor, Timothy, Bacchides, and Antiochus.<sup>29</sup> Even as St. Neilos the Ascetic wrote in his *Ascetic Discourse*, "To build a temple for God one must be in a state of peace."<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, it follows that when God came in the Flesh and cleansed the Temple, this proved to be more than just a routine Spring cleaning. Christ Jesus was demonstrating an axiomatic divine principle, that God does not put new wine into old wineskins.<sup>31</sup> The Jews who were assembled there had some knowledge of this sign and, therefore, they understood that Jesus of Nazareth was insinuating that their Temple was outside of the *Circle of Grace*, and provoked by reasonable curiosity, they asked, 'How bad is it?' or in their own words, "*What sign can you show us for doing this?*"<sup>32</sup> Christ Jesus answered and said to them, "*Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up.*"<sup>33</sup> To paraphrase Him, 'It is so bad, that I am going to have to gut it, then demolish it, and then rebuild it with my own divine hands in three days. And, by destroying this Temple, I will have destroyed your true enemies (sin and death), and in this new Temple they will have no power over you any longer.' Of course, He was talking about His Body, which was to be sacrificed for their sins.

What followed, according to the *Gospel of John*, after the cleansing of the Temple Jesus spoke with Nicodemus about the necessity of the Sacrament of Baptism for entrance into the Kingdom of God. "Amen,

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Exodus.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. 2 Samuel and 1 Kings.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Neh.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. 2 Macc.

<sup>30</sup> *The Philokalia*.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Mt. 9:17.

<sup>32</sup> Jn. 2:18.

<sup>33</sup> Jn. 2:19.

amen. I say to you. No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and spirit."<sup>34</sup> Again, we see the fulfillment of the Old Covenant and a parallel to the children of Israel who were delivered from their enemies only after crossing the Sea of Reeds and thereby being delivered from their enemies. Indeed, the children of Israel had to cooperate with the meditation of Moses if they were to cross the Sea of Reeds, and Moses himself, as mediator, had to *Cooperate with God* by raising his staff to part the waters.<sup>35</sup> Through the Sacrament of Baptism we too *Cooperate with God* and are cleansed of both humanities' 'Original Sin' and particular sin, and are adopted into the Body of Christ - through which we receive the gift of the indwelling of the Holy Trinity.

I regard St. Stephen as a proto-martyr of the Hope of the New and Everlasting Covenant, because through his own eyes we too can share a glimpse of the Kingdom of God in all of its three senses. That is, before St. Stephen was given up to death, a death that he freely accepted, he "*looked up intently to Heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.*"<sup>36</sup> St. Stephen beheld Christ the King in the Divine Kingdom and sitting next to the Ancient of Days, to whom He will hand the Kingdom back over to after the fullness of time. We also see St. Stephen as the Human Kingdom of God Himself, in that it was not Stephen who was speaking to the High Priest in his last discourse, rather it was God, who was speaking truth through His human temple. In other words, God was using dirt to help convert more dirt to work on His mission.<sup>37</sup> Lastly, St. Stephen was one of the first deacons of the Catholic Church, which is the Hypostatic Kingdom of God and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.<sup>38</sup>

Living in true Hope is about stepping out on faith and embracing this same type of freedom that St. Stephen experienced through the grace that this prayer has allotted us. Stephen was/is where Christ is, and he saw the Glory of God. Through self-denial, Stephen fulfilled this Petition! The poor of the world hope for all things of the world, but *the poor in spirit* hope for all things spiritual.

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<sup>34</sup> Jn. 3:5.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Exodus Chapter 14.

<sup>36</sup> Acts 7:55.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Acts. 7:1-53.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Acts 6:1-7.

We must joyfully celebrate that Christ came. We must joyfully participate in His coming in the Sacrament of the Eucharist and joyfully wait for Him to come again at the fulfillment of the Kingdom. For as the written word of God says, *"But seek first the Kingdom [of God] and His righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides."*<sup>39</sup>

The second Glorious mystery of the Rosary - the *Assession* points us to the resurrected Temple, the Body of Christ, which now reigns in eternity with God the Father, in perpetuity with the Holy Spirit in the Church, and reigns also in each adopted child of God.

*"One thing I ask of the Lord; this I seek: To dwell in the Lord's house all the days of my life, To gaze on the Lord's beauty, to visit His temple."* (Psalm 27:4)

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<sup>39</sup> Mt. 6:33.



# ~ *Chapter Fifteen* ~

## *The Thirteenth Petition*

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### **‘TO RECEIVE THE TEACHING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT’**

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#### **The Gospel of John Chapter 17:25-26**

Righteous Father, the world also does not know you, but I know you, and they know that you sent me. I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them.”

**F**aced with the likelihood of the woman divorcing me, I began to consider the most monumental question of my life - marriage or the priesthood - marry another woman or marry the Church. I asked myself, "If you could only do one thing for the rest of your life, what would it be?" My answer to that question came without hesitation, "To celebrate the Mass - to bring Jesus to the people." I then began to consider all of the benefits that a good Christ/Eucharist centered marriage has to offer. There is so much that you can learn about yourself from your spouse and your spouse from you. I also had my daughters to consider and their financial needs - cash, college, cars, clothes, and several other words that begin with the letter 'c'; such, as choking the boys that make them cry.

In the end, God made it clear to me that the choice was mine to make, and that He would and could make use of me in either of these vocations. What I discerned was that God was pleased that I was struggling with the question of 'How I could best *Cooperate with Him*', rather than 'If I should *Cooperate with Him*'.

## WHY GOD MAKES THE BODY A FERTILE CLIMATE FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT

*"I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them."* This Petition is the conclusion of Christ Jesus' intimate prayer for His Bride and it is also the summation of the entire Bridegroom's Prayer. The meaning of this Petition is only different than the previous Petition by the words which precedes the last request, *"that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them."* These last two sentences are so complete that it would have been enough for Jesus to ask just this one thing of His Father, but for our benefit, what was concisely perfect was made abundantly clear; that the Father loves us and propels us to love Him in the same way that He loves His only begotten and beloved Son and His Son loves Him.

For when the perfect love, through which the Father loves His Son, dwells in us, then the Son can dwell in us as well, and then God the Father can love us as He loves Himself and, through that, the greatest commandment will have come full circle. This is the true difference

between adoption and perfection, purgatory and Heaven, Israelite protesting and sainthood, and being *Out of Christ* and being *In Christ*.

Do you remember the Gardener who worked constantly on preparing His dirt for His one special seed? What is better for planting a vine; hard, dry, and unforgiving dirt or moist, firm, and rich dirt? For the dirt was not only being prepared for the seed and the vine, but it was also being prepared for the water to easily flow through it, so that it could reach the seed and the deep roots of the vine. This is the reason why the temple must be cleansed before the Baptism of Fire. How God makes our personal temple and the universal Temple (the Catholic Church) fertile ground for His mission is His business. The concern of this Reflection is to understand why we must cooperate with this good and pleasing desire of God.

The meaning of this last Petition is contained in the intimate unity in which God comes to dwell with His creatures through the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The language of *John* first describes the grace of this Petition in the following way:

*"Whoever eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my Flesh is true food, and my Blood true drink. Whoever eats my Flesh and drinks my Blood remains in me and I in him."*<sup>1</sup>

There is no contradiction between this dialogue with the Jews and the great blessings that Jesus prayed for His Father to bestow upon His creatures. On the contrary, what Christ Jesus is doing here is telling us exactly how *Cooperating with God* works. Jesus prayed, ***"I made known to them your name and I will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them."*** Through this Petition, what had been impossible beforehand had, in an instant, been made possible through the Divine Son asking the Divine Father to move first with the necessary grace that His creatures need to partake in the Divine Nature. Only through the Father answering His Son's prayer, did it become possible for us to freely respond to the invitation to receive Eternal Life by eating His Flesh and drinking His Blood. The path to Eternal Life with God is paved with the necessary graces, which allows us to freely share in all of the fruits of Divinity that God has to offer His creatures.

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<sup>1</sup> Jn. 6:54-55.

I have just used a bunch of high language only to say that there is a Hypostatic union that this Prayer has enabled through the graces found in the Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. That is, in the first sense, the love of the Father for His Son and the love of the Son for us enters our body through the Sacrament of Baptism. In the second sense, this same divine love and holy indwelling enters our body daily in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

Up to this point, we have reflected upon several topics that are raised in the *Gospel of John* and to conclude these spiritual reflections, lastly, we now turn to the Wedding at Cana, so that we might consider the Sacrament of Marriage in the light of this Prayer being for the Bride of Christ.

At this wedding there were six stone water jars (vessels) that had been cleaned and prepared for the ceremonial washing. Because these jars had never been used before, we can call them 'virgin jars'. That there were six of them is no coincidence, as man was created on the sixth day. Something unfortunate and unexpected had occurred at this wedding feast that caused it to run out of wine. Allegorically, the wedding became just like Cain - not able to bear fruit. What happened next was something very, very intimate. After being prompted by His Mother, the Lord told the servers to fill the jars with water. Of course Jesus was fully capable of doing this type of labor Himself, but it was proper for the community to *Cooperate with God*. That was the least that they could do for the free gift of new wine. The virgin jars were filled to the brim with water; that is, the vessel and water, which had previously been separate and foreign to one another, had now become one, and out of this intimate and divine union came Heavenly fruit. The meaning of the imagery here is that whenever man is filled with the Holy Spirit he will produce fruit.<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, in his sermon on *1 John*, explained it in this way:

"Such is our Christian life. By desiring Heaven we exercise the powers of our soul. Now this exercise will be effective only to the extent that we free ourselves from desires leading to infatuation with this world. Let me return to the example I have already used, of filling an empty container. God means to fill each of you with what is good; so cast out what is bad! If he wishes to fill you with honey and you are full of sour wine, where is the

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jn. 2:1-12.

honey to go? The vessel must be emptied of its contents and then be cleaned. Yes, it must be cleansed even if you have to work hard and scour it. It must be made fit for the new thing, whatever it may be.”

The individual who is *In Christ* and the Church *In Christ Cooperates with God* in this Petition by opening themselves up to be thoroughly cleansed everyday and allowing the fullness of the Holy Spirit to work through every orifice of the body. We must never hinder the Holy Spirit! We must never hinder the mission of God! *Cooperating with God* is the only way to reach that point at the center of the *Circle of Grace*.

Only briefly here have I stated what I have encouraged you to be throughout this work: That is, (1) Vulnerable; (2) Disciples; and (3) Vessels. These are the keys to true freedom *In Christ* and the path to being made perfect and saints of God.

*“This I command you: love one another.” (John 15:17)*

## LIVING IN LOVE

Living in Love is what the Bride of Christ does and this prayer is the full expression of our Lord’s expectations of His Bride while she is here on earth. Therefore, “let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten of God and knows God.”<sup>3</sup> Those who truly desire to be saints of God in this life and in the next will love as they ought, because they will tap into that abundant allowance of grace that is freely available for all, and they will *Cooperate with God* into eternity. In contrast, those who do not fight for sainthood will suffer the consequences of intentional mediocrity, which is sin and lawlessness, “No one who is begotten of God commits sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot sin because he is begotten by God.”<sup>4</sup>

The fact is that true love is only interested in what is the best for its object of love, and this must be the consummate attitude of the Church and the disciple. As a father, I freely and generously pour love upon my daughters, and my hope in doing so is not that they would selfishly contain this love, but that they would take it, harvest it, and abundantly pour it out onto others. This is our Eternal Father’s hope for us as well.

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Jn. 4:11.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Jn. 3:9.

True *Cooperation with God* is only found in the mutual reciprocation of love between God, man, and the rest of creation.

The third Glorious mystery of the Rosary - *the Descent of the Holy Spirit* points us to the one source of love and what keeps us within the boundaries of the *Circle of Grace* through our free response to His love.<sup>5</sup>

Nothing else can be said about the necessity and value of being *In Christ* without repeating myself. Therefore, let us close these spiritual reflections by meditating upon one of the underlining themes of this prayer, which is 'True Unity' amongst all the people of God.

The grace of God has always been available to end the protest and for all of His children to return to His One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Do not be deceived by anyone who wants to complicate the issue of Christian Unity with cultural, doctrinal, or historic differences as excuses for us not to be one as Christ Jesus prayed we must. Such persons do not believe that God the Father answers His Son's prayers! Neither are they sensitive to the mission of the Holy Spirit! Furthermore, the truth is not in these people and they do not love God as they ought. Therefore, it remains for us in this present age to address this sin of division and denomination through prayer, proclamation of the word (love), and fasting.

In that regard, I close this book with the eternal and echoing thoughts of Pope John XXIII:

**"*That they may be one.*"** This is the divine Redeemer's purpose, and we must do our best to further it. . . . On the last day of the particular and universal judgment every individual will be asked, not where he succeeded in restoring unity but whether he prayed, labored, and suffered for it . . . and whether he gave full scope to impulses of love.

This prayer from Christ's heart must persuade us to renew and intensify our efforts, so that all Catholics may continue faithfully to love and to manifest the Church's primary distinguishing mark, which is unity, and so that, in the vast and varied field of Christian denominations and beyond, there may be formed that unity so ardently desired by all honest and generous hearts."

*"I urge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you,*

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Sir. 15:11-20

*but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers, by Chloe's people, that there are rivalries among you. I mean that each of you is saying, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Kephas," or "I belong to Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you Baptized in the name of Paul? For Christ did not send me to Baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, so that the Cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning." (1 Corinthians 1:10-13)*

## APPENDIX A: Jesus' Prayer of the Hour of (CCC 2746-2751):

**2746** When “his hour’ came, Jesus prayed to the Father.<sup>1</sup> His prayer, the longest transmitted by the Gospel, embraces the whole economy of creation and Salvation, as well as his death and Resurrection. The prayer of the Hour of Jesus always remains his own, just as his Passover “once and for all” remains ever present in the liturgy of his Church.

**2747** Christian Tradition rightly calls this prayer the “priestly” prayer of Jesus. It is the prayer of our high priest, inseparable from his sacrifice, from his passing over (Passover) to the Father to whom he is wholly “consecrated.”<sup>2</sup>

**2748** In this Paschal and sacrificial prayer, everything is recapitulated in Christ:<sup>3</sup> God and the world; the Word and the flesh; eternal life and time; the love that hands itself over and the sin that betrays it; the disciples present and those who will believe in him by their word; humiliation and glory. It is the prayer of unity.

**2749** Jesus fulfilled the work of the Father completely; his prayer, like his sacrifice, extends until the end of time. The prayer of this hour fills the end-times and carries them toward their consummation. Jesus, the Son to whom the Father has given all things, has given himself wholly back to the Father, yet expresses himself with a sovereign freedom<sup>4</sup> by virtue of the power the Father has given him over all flesh. The Son, who made himself Servant, is Lord, the *Pantocrator*. Our high priest who prays for us is also the one who prays in us and the God who hears our prayer.

**2750** By entering into the holy name of the Lord Jesus we can accept, from within, the prayer he teaches us: “Our Father!” His priestly prayer fulfills, from within, the great petitions of the Lord’s Prayer: concern for the Father’s name;<sup>5</sup> passionate zeal for his kingdom (glory);<sup>6</sup> the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Jn. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jn. 17:11, 13, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Eph. 1:10.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jn. 17:11, 13, 19, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Jn. 17:6, 11, 12, 26.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Jn. 17:1, 5, 10, 22, 23-26.



accomplishment of the will of the Father, of his plan of Salvation,<sup>7</sup> and deliverance from evil.<sup>8</sup>

**2751** Finally, in this prayer Jesus reveals and gives to us the “knowledge,” inseparably one, of the Father and of the Son,<sup>9</sup> which is the very mystery of the life of prayer.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Jn. 17:2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12, 24.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Jn. 17:15.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Jn. 17:3, 6-10, 25.

## APPENDIX B: I-Phrase of the Bridegroom's Prayer

If our Lord Jesus were to recount this prayer back to you personally, this is how it would probably be communicated, *if* He were to use the same words from the text. 'I-Phrasing' is a very personal approach to reading Biblical text and it even puts us in the position of feeling even more responsible and accountable to the will of God.

❖ *1<sup>st</sup> Petition, 'to Receive Eternal Life' - (17:1-5)*

Now this is eternal life, that you should know our Father, the only true God, and the one whom He sent, Jesus Christ. I glorified Him on earth by accomplishing the work that He gave me to do. Now our Father glorifies me, with Him, with the glory that I had with Him before the world began.

❖ *2<sup>nd</sup> Petition, 'to Obey the word of the Father' - (17:6)*

I revealed our Father's name to those of you who were given to me out of the world. You belonged to our Father, and He gave you to me and you have kept His word.

❖ *3<sup>rd</sup> Petition, 'to Know the Father through the Son's Election' - (17:7-10)*

Now you know that everything our Father gave me was from Him, because the words He gave to me I have given you, and You accepted our Father's words spoken from Me and you have truly understood that I came from our Father and you have believed that he sent me. I pray for you. I do not pray for the world, but for those of you who our Father has given me, because you are His, and everything of mine is His and everything of His is mine, and I have been glorified by you.

❖ *4<sup>th</sup> Petition, 'for Protection in the Name (authority) of Jesus' - (17:11-12)*

And now I will no longer be in the world, but you are still in the world, while I am going to our Holy Father, who I have asked to keep you in His name that He has given Me, so that you may be one just as we are one. When I was with you I protected you in His name that He gave me, and I guarded you, and none of you

were lost except the son of destruction, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled.

❖ *5<sup>th</sup> Petition, 'to Have Joy in Christ Jesus' - (17:13)*

But now I am going to our Father. I have spoken this in the world so that you may share my joy completely.

❖ *6<sup>th</sup> Petition, 'to Persevere in this World' - (17:14-16)*

I have given you our Father's word, and the world has hated you, because, you do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. I have asked our Father that He not take you out of the world, but that He keep you from the evil one. You must not belong to the world anymore than I belonged to the world.

❖ *7<sup>th</sup> Petition, 'to be Consecrated Truth' - (17:17 & 19)*

I have asked our Father to consecrate you in truth. His word is truth. And I have consecrated myself for you, so that you also may be consecrated in truth.

❖ *8<sup>th</sup> Petition, 'to Be Missionaries (Finding & Accepting our Vocation)' - (17:18)*

As our Father sent me into the world, so I send you into the world.

❖ *9<sup>th</sup> Petition, 'to Believe in the message of His Apostles' - (17:20)*

I pray not only for the ones I have sent, but also for those of you who will believe in me through the Apostle's word.

❖ *10<sup>th</sup> Petition, 'to be Catholic (One, Whole, Holy, All - Universal)' - (17:21)*

So that you may all be one, as the Father is in me, and I in our Father, that you may also be in us, so the world will believe that our Father sent me.

❖ *11<sup>th</sup> Petition, 'to Cooperate with God in Faith' - (17:22-23)*

And I have given you the glory our Father gave me, so that you may be one, as the Father and I are one, I in you and our Father in me, that you may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that the Father sent me, and that He loved you even as He loved me.

❖ *12<sup>th</sup> Petition, 'to Seek First the Kingdom and His Glory' - (17:24)*

You are the gift to me from our Father. I wish that where I am you may also be with me, that you may see my glory that our Father gave me, because He loved me before the foundation of the world.

❖ *13<sup>th</sup> Petition, 'to Receive the Teaching of the Holy Spirit' - (17:25-26)*

The world does not know our Righteous Father, but I know Him, and you know that He sent me. I made known to you His name and I will make it known, that the love with which He loved me may be in you and I in you.

APPENDIX C: Holy Trinity Invocation (Rosary)

This prayer can be prayed with or without beads, but you might get the most out of it by pausing between each invocation and the prayer.

<p><b>1. Holding the Rosary:</b> Begin with making the Sign of the Cross</p> <p><b>2. Fingers on the First Bead:</b> Lord, have mercy (repeat) Christ, have mercy (repeat) Lord, have mercy (repeat) God the Father in Heaven,     <i>have mercy on us.</i> (repeat after each invocation) God the Son, Redeemer of the World God the Holy Spirit</p>	<p><b>3. Fingers on the Second Bead:</b> Pray the Lord's Prayer.</p> <p><b>4. Fingers on the Third Bead:</b> Pray the Apostle's Creed.</p> <p><b>5. Fingers on the Fourth Bead:</b> Pray the Hail Mary.</p>
FIRST DECADE	SECOND DECADE
<p>Begin each bead by saying (invoking) <i>'God our Father'</i> and end each bead by praying <i>'Have mercy on us (me).'</i></p> <p>1. First Person of the Holy Trinity 2. God of Gods, Lord of Lords, Host of Host 3. Ancient of Days 4. Anchor of Creation 5. All Gracious 6. All Just 7. All Mighty 8. All Holy 9. All Loving 10. All in All</p>	<p>Begin each bead by saying (invoking) <i>'Christ Jesus'</i> and end each bead by praying <i>'Heal us (me), Guide us (me), Send us (me).'</i></p> <p>1. Second Person of the Holy Trinity 2. The Messiah and Son of the Living God 3. The Prince of Peace 4. The Light of the World 5. The Door 6. The Good Shepherd 7. The True Vine 8. The Bread of Life 9. The Way, the Truth, and the Life 10. The Resurrection</p>

## THIRD DECADE

Begin each bead by saying (invoking) '*Holy Spirit*' and end each bead by praying '*Come to Us (me)*'.

1. Third Person of the Holy Trinity
2. Breath of God
3. Glory of the Father and the Son
4. Source of all Wisdom
5. Source of all Understanding
6. Source of all Counsel
7. Source of all Fortitude
8. Source of all Knowledge
9. Source of all Piety
10. Source of all Reverence due to God

**9. After the Third Decade:**

Pray the 'Glory Be'.

**TIPS FOR PRAYING THE HOLY TRINITY INVOCATION:**

Feel free to exchange the word 'us' in these petitions with 'me' or even with more precise needs and/or causes; such as your marriage, another person, end of abortion, help in understanding sacred Scripture, and etcetera.

An easy way to memorize these petitions is by making sentences out of the first word of each one. For example, for the second decade the sentence that I like to use is My (Messiah) Puppy (Prince of Peace) Laid (Light of the World) Down (Door) - God (Good Shepherd) Thought (Tru<sup>e</sup> Vine) Bread (Bread) Was (Way, Life, Truth) Right (Resurrection) .

Have Fun!