

## XVI

### GRACE, VIRTUES, GIFTS

**B**Y baptism we are incorporated with Christ, built into that Church which is truly His body, so that we live in Him and He in us. We must look at this life, the life of grace, more closely. Reread Section IX on the supernatural life before continuing with what is here. What is said more lengthily there may be summarized briefly.

Men, we have seen, have by God's will a destiny of which by nature they are incapable; if we are to live the life of heaven, to see God direct, to "know as we are known", we have to receive new powers in our souls which are not there by nature. And, because this life is a preparation for the next, because the next life flows without break from this, we must receive these new powers in the soul here upon earth. As received here, the supernatural life, the life of sanctifying grace, does not produce its full flowering in giving us here and now the direct vision of God. But it does lift the soul to new possibilities even in this life.

Observe that we are not given a new soul, but new powers in the soul we already have. Our intellect is given a new access to truth by faith: now it can accept God as the supreme Source of truth, whose word is final. The will receives two virtues. One is hope, by which it desires God in the certainty that He is attainable. The other is charity, by which it loves God. These three are called the theological virtues, because their object is God, they relate the soul directly and rightly to Him.

## THE MORAL VIRTUES

With grace there enter the soul not only the theological virtues but also the moral virtues, which are concerned with our relation to all things less than God. Here too there is an uneven division between intellect and will, the intellect having one of them, prudence; the will having three, justice and temperance and fortitude.

Prudence first. It is possible for the intellect, enlightened by faith, to know the truth about God, yet fail to see all the windings of the road we must tread to come to Him and see how we should carry ourselves upon the road. Prudence is the virtue by which the grace-aided soul *sees* the world as it actually is and our relation to it as it should be. Unhappily prudence has, in ordinary speech, a meaning which can actually contradict the very nature of the virtue. It tends to mean something very close to timidity, playing everything safe, taking no risks—risks meaning anything that might reduce our material well-being—martyrdom, for instance. In fact there are circumstances in which letting oneself be martyred is highly prudent, and the avoidance of martyrdom imprudent in the extreme. There is no gain in avoiding martyrdom at the loss of one's eternal soul. The very motto of prudence is that he who loses his life shall save it.

Prudence is thus the virtue which enables the intellect to see what is right to do. The other three help the will to do what the intellect sees. Justice concerns our dealing with others. It is a burning will that they have what is due to them. It is not simply that we refrain from grasping what we are not entitled to; this of itself might be only spiritual anaemia. Justice means a really profound concern that others should have their rights, driving us to do something about it.

Temperance and fortitude concern our handling of ourselves. The world contains things—in some moods we feel it is full of things—which attract us almost irresistibly—though we know we should not have them, cannot have them without damage to the soul. The world also contains things which frighten us, which we would do anything to avoid, yet which duty calls upon us to face. Temperance aids the will to turn from the dazzlingly attractive things we should shun. Fortitude aids the will to face what every instinct tells it to run away from. Temperance moderates us. Fortitude stimulates us.

With faith and hope and charity and the four moral virtues it might seem that we have all the helps the soul requires to reach its supernatural destiny. But there are more helps, as we shall see.

#### ACTUAL GRACE

So far all our talk has been of sanctifying grace. But there is actual grace too. The similarity of name, both being called grace, could mislead us into thinking they are practically identical. But the word *grace* simply means a free gift of God, something of which there is not even a beginning in our nature, wholly given therefore. But although both actual grace and sanctifying grace meet this definition, the gifts given in each are quite different. It might help our thinking if we spoke of one as supernatural life, the other as supernatural impulsion.

Sanctifying grace is a life in the soul, making it almost a new thing, giving it and its faculties new powers. Actual grace is the divine energy setting the soul in motion towards some particular goal otherwise beyond its reach. Sanctifying grace indwells the soul and abides in it. Actual grace does neither. It does not abide—it is transient, like a wind that blows for a while and then is gone, the whole point being to

take advantage of it while it blows. Nor does it indwell: it does not live in the soul but acts upon it in a sense from outside; it sets intellect and will in motion without becoming a permanent quality of either, very much as a wind moves a boat but does not in any sense become a permanent element in the boat's structure.

We may indeed think of actual graces—observe that we never speak of sanctifying graces but only grace—as sudden gusts of the wind of the Spirit. To them applies very strongly what Our Lord said to Nicodemus (John iii. 8): “The Spirit breathes where he will: and you hear his voice, but you know not whence he comes and whither he goes.” Without this thrust of the divine energy, the soul could not take the first step in its sanctification. But with it, the soul is capable of movements otherwise beyond it. If it responds and makes them—above all a movement of love towards God—then it will receive sanctifying grace. If it responds, notice; for it is supernatural impulsion, not compulsion.

Actual graces do not cease when the soul receives sanctifying grace. God continues to send them to enable us in this, that or the other matter to see what is best for us to do and to make the effort, if we happen to be reluctant, to do it. This brings us to the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. We receive these with sanctifying grace, so that they are abiding qualities in the graced soul. The simplest statement of their function is that they catch the wind of actual grace when it blows, so that we respond to it, and respond fruitfully.

### THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY GHOST

It is from Isaias (xi. 2) that we get the names of the seven gifts: he is speaking of the Messiah to come: “The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of fortitude, the

spirit of knowledge and of piety. And he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge according to the sight of the eyes, nor reprove according to the hearing of the ears."

For once intellect gets more of them than will: to it belong understanding, wisdom, knowledge, counsel. Each of these is worth long and detailed study. Here we can merely indicate what they are for. We have seen that by the theological virtue of faith we accept whatever God has revealed for no other reason than that He has revealed it; by the gift of understanding we are aided to grasp more clearly what the truths we have accepted actually mean, and to go deeper and deeper in their exploration. We may think of understanding as giving eyes to faith. Wisdom makes the soul more intensely responsive not simply to the meaning, but to the value of what we have learned about God. Knowledge is also concerned with response to value, but to the spiritual value of created things. Counsel helps us to be aware of the special guidance offered us by the Holy Spirit in relation to what we must do and must avoid for our soul's eternal good here and now; in a way it bears something of the same relation to the moral virtue of prudence that understanding bears to faith.

There remain piety, fortitude and fear of the Lord. We have seen how counsel gives a kind of special edge to the moral virtue of prudence. These last three gifts bear roughly the same relation to the other moral virtues.

Piety is related to justice in one rather special way. For, because justice means giving to others what they are entitled to, to it belongs the virtue of religion, which pays that debt to God. We may define piety as love of one to whom we are already bound by the duty of obedience. We may think of it as loving God solely because He is lovable—not because of

the glory of the world He has created or because of all that He has done for ourselves, but simply for His own glory. It is a love of God, wholly self-forgetful.

Fortitude is related, naturally, to the virtue of the same name. Fear of the Lord is seen by theologians in special relation to the virtue of temperance. Temperance, remember, helps us to refuse delights forbidden by God's law; fear, the gift, aids in various ways but most, perhaps, by an awareness of the lovableness of God which does something to take the glow from the delight with which the forbidden action draws us.

In fact, the relation between the gifts and the virtues, to which each brings what I have called edge, or impetus, or clarity, is a matter upon which theologians have written profoundly and brilliantly, but it is rather beyond our present stage. But one thing at least we must add to this brief statement: just as in the giving of actual graces the Spirit blows where it pleases Him and we do not know whence or whither, or even with any certainty when, so the response within us of the gifts is something of which we are not normally aware. The supernatural life as a whole has no direct access to our bodily senses, or to the emotions, which lie in the frontier region where soul and body meet, or to our consciousness as it is aware of things in the natural order.

In our analysis of the life of grace we have talked of the seven virtues, theological and moral, and the seven gifts. Over and above these are the beatitudes and fruits, which need not concern us now. All these, so to speak, *are* the state of grace; whoever is in it has them all—there is no such thing as being in grace and lacking any of them, though the dullness or reluctance of the response of our nature to one or other of them may make us feel that we do. With the first coming of grace to the soul we receive it totally. We may very well have increase of grace, but this will be a matter of growing

intensity, not of new elements. The first coming is by faith, the root from which the whole life grows. Without it we should get none of the rest, for what sort of relation should we have with a God in whom we did not believe? It is worth dwelling on the simple fact that faith means a new contact of the intellect with God, and that it is in the direct contact of this same intellect with God that the Beatific Vision ultimately consists. Our end is in our beginning.

#### HOW GRACE IS LOST

How do we lose grace? By mortal sin, obviously, a choice of our own will as against God's so serious and deliberate that it really breaks the union between us and Him. Here too we need a shade more precision. Think of grace under the figure of a tree—faith at the root, above it hope, above that charity, above that all the leaves and branches of moral virtues and gifts and beatitudes and fruits. Faith and hope and charity are the trunk of the tree. Each of these is lost by a serious sin against it; losing any one of them, we lose all of the tree above it, but not necessarily that which lies below. A sin against the love of God does not destroy hope or faith. These we lose only by sins which involve their direct denial. Hope is lost, as we have seen, by despair or presumption; faith by unbelief.

But charity is the life-giver. Sinning against it we lose the supernatural life, we are without sanctifying grace. We may still have faith and hope, and they will be quite real, but not saving, not life-giving. Yet not valueless. They can be real aids to the movement of nature against sin which may lead God to energize once more in the soul by grace. A man who knows God attainable and desires to come to Him, though caught in some sin to which he is too powerfully attached, has a strong reason still for fighting against sin. Even if he

has nothing left but faith—hope having gone the way of charity—yet the belief in God, though he is not doing anything about it, constitutes a point of return which the man without faith lacks; though even there we need place no limit to the life-giving power of the Holy Ghost—the prayers of others may still aid a man who will not pray for himself, winning actual graces to which man's power to respond does not cease while this life lasts.