

## Grace: Our Participation In Eternal Life - by Sr. Margaret Dorgan, DCM

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### **GRACE: OUR PARTICIPATION IN ETERNAL LIFE (Part 7)**

We who are dwellers on earth see all around us the marvels of our temporary dwelling place, but much, much more is reserved for us. Through sanctifying grace, an everlasting homeland awaits us in heaven. It is not a far-off foreign county we are called to. Even now we are given the capacity to anticipate the immortal inheritance marked with our names. Through sanctifying grace, eternal glory becomes rightfully ours although it is deferred. In fact, grace is described by theologians as the beginning of glory, inchoate glory.

St. Therese writes to her sister Celine, "Life is only a dream, and soon we shall wake up, and what joy ... the greater our sufferings are the more will be our glory" (Lt 82, p 537). She is only sixteen when she makes this observation. Years later, she will see not suffering but love as determining our never-ending recompense. Yes, suffering may release more love in me, but it could be that rejoicing takes that role. Finally Therese acknowledges that surrender to whatever God wills is the fullest expression of our love for God in this changing world. When she is seventeen, she writes, "I wonder what time really is ... already God sees us in glory. He takes delight in our eternal beatitude. Ah! what good this thought does my soul" (Letter 108).

Therese recognizes the glory that will be our portion forever, shining within us already, giving us light to illumine the dark places we may have to pass through. In First Thessalonians, St. Paul says, "We exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to lead a life worthy of God who calls you into God's own kingdom and glory" (2: 11,12).

Grace is so closely linked to glory that we can say it is of the same order. We know that through grace, we already possess the Blessed Trinity within us. It is only the conditions of our time-bound existence that prevent us from beholding the inward glory that is ours at this very moment.

In dying, the bonds of the flesh fall away. Departure from earth releases us and we move toward the paradise guaranteed by Christ. We lift our gaze to a realm not yet experienced but one that our faith foresees in an incomplete manner. Though the vision of what lies ahead is indistinct, we know that Jesus bends over us to raise us to an afterlife prepared by His love. Members of a human race wounded in its very nature call to a Savior Who understands our frail being through His own experience.

If grace has not fulfilled its work of sanctification when death comes, then whatever still needs to be cleansed is accomplished in a purifying process which is a prelude to Heaven. We pray for the Holy Souls in Purgatory, this intermediate state which we cannot comprehend completely.

All that lies beyond our earthly passage is cloaked in mystery. But St. Paul assures us in Chapter 9 of his Epistle to the Romans that we are children of the promise in whom God makes known the riches of His glory. We are prepared by God as recipients of His compassion.

Here below in times of trial, we find hope in the words of First Peter, "You are blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (4:14). Yes, we are blessed but we need to know more about our blessedness in this world of time where change is the order of our days.

God out of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. Both with and in Christ Jesus, God raised us up and gave us a place in the heavens" (Eph 2: 4-6)

As our feet walk along the uneven soil of this world, we are united each step of the way with our brothers and sisters in the global society we inhabit--and also with those who have gone before us, marked as we are with God's mercy. What is being brought to fruition in us manifests "the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus"((Eph 2:7).

Every one of us can echo St. Therese's exultant words, "**I know God has done great things in me and I sing of this each day with joy**" ( Letter 224).

Sister Margaret Dorgan, DCM