



FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION.

SANCTIFYING GRACE, THE MOST PRECIOUS GIFT.

“Ave, gratia plena.”

“*Hail, full of grace.*”—St. Luke: 28.

These words, with which the Angel saluted Mary, the tender Virgin, in the little room at Nazareth, might have been applied to Her before She saw the light of this world. Whilst all other men, in consequence of their descent from Adam and Eve, are stained with original sin, Mary was, from the first moment of Her existence, by a special favor of God and the merits of His divine Son, free from original sin, and so adorned with sanctifying grace, which preserved Her from sin, that not for one moment of Her life was She deprived of sanctifying grace. For this reason the Angel salutes Her with the words: “Thou art full of grace.” And from this salutation of the Angel’s, the holy Fathers conclude that Mary was conceived and born without sin. The sanctifying grace, with which Mary was conceived and born, always increased during Her blessed life, and therefore She was “full of grace.”

According to the opinion of St. Augustine, the Mother of God was more blessed because She bore the Son of God in Her heart, than that She bore Him in Her womb; that is to say, more blessed through sanctifying grace, than through the divine Motherhood. What a precious gift from heaven, then, must sanctifying grace be! We have become partakers thereof in holy Baptism, and when we have lost it by a grievous sin, we have obtained it again, by worthily receiving the Sacrament of Penance. Oh! if we only knew how to prize this grace of God; for it is more precious than all that the world offers. It is:

- I. Our true dignity.
- II. Our true wealth.
- III. Our true happiness, here, and hereafter.

Holy Mary, full of grace, stand by us, in to-day’s contemplation, so that we may, for the future, after your example, guard carefully and increase the precious treasure of sanctifying grace, so that we may live and die in the grace of God.

Sanctifying grace raises man to the highest dignity, namely, the dignity of a child of God. We became children of God in holy Baptism. When we came into this world we were

laden with original sin, and therefore, as the apostle says, “Were by nature the children of wrath” (Eph. 11: 3), objects of God’s displeasure. Through holy Baptism, that bath of regeneration, we were cleansed from original sin and adorned with sanctifying grace, and through this grace we became an object of the Divine good pleasure, children of God. As at the Baptism of Jesus, so at the Baptism of a child, the heavenly Father speaks from heaven: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I well pleased” (Matt. iii. 17). And here the beloved disciple cries out in admiration: “Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called and should be the sons God” (I John iii. 1). Dear Christians! to be a friend of God is truly a great happiness, a great honor. Now, was it not a great honor for Abraham that God spoke to him, as friend to friend? But the honor of a child of God is still greater, for the child belongs to the family and is an heir. And does not the world consider it glorious to belong to a royal family, to be the child of a king, or possibly the heir to the throne? And yet, what is this dignity in comparison with the dignity of a child of God, the King of Kings, and the heir to the Kingdom of Heaven! By this dignity the Christian enters into the family of God, and so into the most intimate fellowship with God (John xvii. 21). And to this high dignity even the beggar is raised through sanctifying grace. If he possesses this, he is a child of God, a son of the Almighty King. Oh! that Christians would think of their high dignity, to which you are raised by Baptism, or if they have lost it, to which they are restored through the Sacrament of Penance. A wise king gave his son this advice: “Wherever you may be, always remember that you are a King’s son and behave befitting this dignity.” Yes, dear Christian, you too remember that you are a child of God, and bear yourself according to this dignity; avoid everything which is low and mean, avoid conversations and actions which dishonor and offend God, and which are unbecoming a child of God. Be contented with your state, do not envy others, who are placed higher than you are; remember that earthly greatness and grandeur are vain and transitory. For what brings man respect and dignity? Virtue, according to the words of Holy Scripture: “Oh, how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory! For the memory thereof is immortal; because it is known both with God and with men” (Wis. iv. 1). Sin on the other hand causes disgrace and shame. Therefore this prayer is recommended to all, but especially to Christian young women: “Preserve us from sin and shame.” What gives man real greatness? A self-sacrificing love for God and our neighbor. For this reason we honor a St. Martin, a St. Vincent de Paul, and so many others. What gives an undying fame? Briefly: holiness of life, the fruit of grace. Mary was unimportant in the eyes of the world, and in her own eyes, a lowly maiden; but great was her holiness before God, and in her unto this day are these words fulfilled: “Behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed” (Luke i. 48).

II. As sanctifying grace makes us truly great, so it makes us truly rich. In the Apocalypse (iii. 17) it says: “Because thou sayest: I am rich, and made wealthy, and have need of nothing; and knowest not, that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Many in this world are rich, like the rich glutton, but poor before God. Many are

poor in this world, like poor Lazarus, but rich before God. For he who has not sanctifying grace is poor, but he who has it is rich before God, rich in real treasures, truly rich.

What the old law says of wisdom is true in the new law of sanctifying grace. "Now all good things came to me together with her, and innumerable riches through her hands" (Wis. vii. ii). Yes, with sanctifying grace come all the other graces. For by sanctifying grace, which is the life of the soul, we are living members of that body, of which Christ is the head. By it we partake of the merits of Jesus Christ and His Saints, partake in all the treasures of grace which Jesus Christ has left to His Church, so that we can say with the Psalmist: "I am a partaker with all them that fear thee, and that keep thy commandments" (Ps. cxviii. 63). We partake in all the prayers and good works of the Saints and the just, because we stand with them in a living communion, which is called the Communion of Saints. Through sanctifying grace we shall be like a good tree, which yieldeth good fruit (Matt. vii. 17), so that the least good action, the cup of cold water, given in the name of Jesus, will bring us a heavenly reward (Mark ix. 40). On the other hand, he who has not sanctifying grace can do nothing meritorious for heaven, not even if he made the greatest sacrifice (I. Cor. xiii. 3.) Therefore, sanctifying grace is a rich source of heavenly treasures, in comparison with which all earthly treasures are to be considered as naught. "What do you possess," cries out St. Augustine, "if you do not possess the only good, which is God?" The possessions of this world cannot satisfy the heart of man, because it is created for God, and therefore can only find rest in God, as the same Saint says: "Thou hast created us for Thyself, O God, and our heart is uneasy until it rests in Thee."

Mary, who was adorned from the first moment of her conception with sanctifying grace, not only carefully preserved it, but by a holy life co-operated with it faithfully, and every moment of her life increased this sanctifying grace, so that She was filled with grace, and also overflowing with merits for heaven; yes, She was not only the fullest in grace, but also the richest in heavenly treasures. We can apply to her the praise of Holy Scripture: "Many daughters have gathered together riches; thou hast surpassed them all" (Prov. xxxi. 29). Let us follow Mary's example. Let us preserve sanctifying grace, as the most precious treasure; let us take care not to commit grievous sin. And should we fall into grievous sin, let us not delay to purify our hearts therefrom in the Sacrament of Penance. And as Solomon prayed for one thing, namely, wisdom, with which all good came to him at the same time, let us pray to God and Mary for one thing, sanctifying grace, with which comes all good.

III. Our true happiness, in time, as well as in eternity, consists in sanctifying grace. "For wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sins" (Wis. i. 4). Even so, sanctifying grace, and with it the Holy Ghost, cannot enter and dwell in a soul which is not at least free from grievous sin. Where sanctifying grace is, there is also a good conscience. "For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God" (Rom. viii. 16). Where sanctifying grace is, there is in addition the hope of eternal life, for the Apostle says: "And if sons, heirs also; heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ; yet so if ye suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him" (Rom. viii.

17). And this hope fills us with consolation in suffering, as often as we say with the Apostle:

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us” (Rom. viii. 18).

Yes, sanctifying grace is the surest pledge of eternal life itself; for, if we die in it, we are sure of heaven, and we shall be eternally happy. The world cannot make us happy in time and eternity, only holy religion and sanctifying grace, and all those who claim they make the world happy without religion are false prophets.

How sanctifying grace, joined to the testimony of the conscience, brings consolation, we see in Mary, who, being full of grace, was also full of consolation in the greatest and bitterest sufferings. On the other hand, man, even when the world offers him so many charming pleasures, has no real happiness, if he fails to have sanctifying grace, the testimony of a good conscience. For “there is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord” (Is. xlvi. 22). And if the wicked have no peace, neither have they consolation in life or death; they are therefore unhappy for time and eternity. It is then sanctifying grace which makes us great before God, truly rich in God, and eternally happy with God. Indeed, he who has found it, has found a precious treasure, more precious than all the treasures of the world, which cannot make us really happy. And we lose this precious treasure by grievous sin. Oh, how foolishly the sinner behaves, who for a vain honor, for a miserable desire, sells this precious gift, his kinship of God, his heirship to heaven, his soul and his blessedness!

Let us then avoid sin, and pray to Mary, the Immaculate Mother of God, for a pure heart. “Ave Maria, gratia plena!” Holy Mary, as you were full of grace on earth, so you are in heaven full of glory, as Queen of Heaven. But you are still full of grace for us poor pilgrims of earth. For thou art, as the Holy Father tells us, the treasurer of heavenly grace. Through thy hands graces are dispensed, which thy divine Son has merited. Thy hands are filled, as thou didst once appear to a Saint with shining jewels, the heavenly treasures of grace. Oh, stretch forth thy merciful hand, enrich and bless us, Mary! and keep us in the state of grace. Pray for us, Mary! Amen.



Remember, to renew your TOTAL CONSECRATION to Jesus through Mary on the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

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