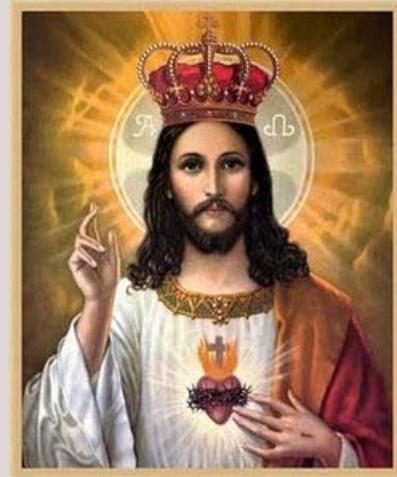


THE GRACE OF CHRIST, AS HE IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

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"Living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love."¹ From the moment of the Incarnation, Christ has two intellects and two wills: human and divine. This means that Christ willed with a human will and knew with a human intellect, as well as knowing and willing with His divine intellect and will which are eternal and common to the three Persons of the Trinity. These two types of operation - human and divine - are infinitely distinct but united in the unity of one Person, which, is a mystery to man.



One cannot help but wonder if Christ's human soul was elevated and aided by grace. The grace of union, the union of His humanity and divinity, is an indescribable gift received by Christ's human soul. He received it because He is the second Person in the Trinity, because He is the Son of God. It is eminent that we are reminded that the hypostatic union is Christ's human nature assumed by the Person of the Son. St. Thomas clearly explains that this grace is infinite and absolutely unique, and was given at the instant of the Incarnation, never to be revoked, he says, "a twofold grace may be considered in Christ; the first being the grace of union, which, as was said, is for Him to be personally united to the Son of God, which union has been bestowed gratis on the human nature..."²

Precisely because Christ's humanity was assumed by the Son of God in the hypostatic union, Christ's human soul still needed to be enriched by all the plenitude of created supernatural gifts that it could receive, so as to make it a fitting and utterly holy vessel of the divine Person of the Word. Without sanctifying grace, Christ's human soul would not have been interiorly sanctified. Thus Christ also needed the absolute fullness of sanctifying grace in His soul as a consequence of the grace of union, so as to be holy in every way. After the grace of union, Christ received habitual grace that is sanctifying grace which had already reached its end, had reached its fullness and could therefore not increase, but rather only be communicated to others by Him. He had the fullness of grace. He had what man strives for which was an absolute fullness that could only be increasingly manifested as He grew up and fulfilled His mission. This fullness is due to three reasons: His union with the Word, the dignity of His human soul and because He is head of the human race.

One of the greatest mysteries regarding the Person of Christ is that He was fully divine and is also fully human. As a human person, He needed to grow, learn and receive God's grace just as any other child does. Although He could have simply descended to Earth full grown with all knowledge - He choose to make Himself another creature among His beloved creation. In His infinite love, He redeemed mankind in every aspect of life, from infancy to death. He grew and learned, acquired knowledge and virtue and was the face of God's love. As was common in that era, He would have learned about the Jewish religion from His mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary as well as learned from the examples of Saint Joseph. Christ's humanity was sanctified by habitual grace which would become the channel by which His mystical Body would be endowed with graces. He suffered beyond man's understanding for He knew humanity would be unfaithful and deny Him time and time again, yet He endured it all. Therefore, He is the best example of patience and trust during the greatest of trials. "And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace."³ Blessed John XXIII, explains, "In St. Leo's view, this remarkable unity of the Church has its well-spring in the birth of God's Incarnate Word." For Christ's birth is the source of life for Christian people; the birthday of the Head is the birthday of the Body."⁴ It is clear that there can be no body without a head, therefore the Church, the faithful make up the mystical body of Christ and He is the head. God grants man the graces he most needs to fulfill the designs He has planned for each individual and for all as a whole. It is always a plan of love - for the greater good of all and salvation of each soul.

Man is called to participate fully in the life of Christ, to respond to His love and grace. "Although every individual is called in his own turn, and all the Church's sons are separated from one another by intervals of time, yet the entire body of the faithful, born in the baptismal font, is born with Christ in His nativity, just as all are crucified with Him in His passion, raised again in His resurrection, and set at the Father's right hand in His ascension."⁵ Man taps into the grace that Christ's life offers through sacraments which confer graces on the soul. Blessed John Paul II explains, "Through all the fields of activity in which the Church expresses, finds and confirms herself, we must constantly aim at him "who is the head."⁶ One could venture to say that during His time on earth Christ, as far as is known, at least until His mission began, He relied primarily on acquired knowledge. The graces bestowed on Him, the fullness of His divinity were evident by His life first and then by the miracles He performed to reveal to man the love of God.

As Head of the Church, the faithful - that is the Body of the Church, fully participates in the life of Christ. Ideally in everyday life this participation would consist of a relationship with Christ and participation of the sacraments. He leads and rules over all the other members giving them supernatural life stemming from the grace that supremely sanctified His human soul. He is the head of our bodies and soul - first our souls and then our bodies - the soul lives through Christ and the Spirit dwells in the body. He is the head of all men - to the measure that we allow Him, hold a relationship with Him. While with the Apostles, Christ conferred His authority, "He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority."⁷ Throughout the centuries this authority has been handed down through the successor of Peter, "you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church,"⁸ thus Peter became the first Pope. The Pope participates to some extent of the Headship of Christ, a leadership dependent on Christ. However, Christ Himself is the only one who rules over souls.

Christ's fullness of grace in His human soul was distinct from that of Our Lady, for she grew in grace in every moment of her life through a perfect correspondence with God's will. Christ's fullness was such that He could not grow in it, for it was at its maximum from the beginning: containing within it the entire grace to be granted to all men through the Church, including that of Our Lady. St. Thomas says, "The Blessed Virgin is said to be full of grace, not on the part of grace itself - since she had not grace in its greatest possible excellence - nor for all the effects of grace; but she is said to be full of grace in reference to herself, i.e. inasmuch as she had sufficient grace for the state to which God had chosen her, i.e. to be the mother of His Only-begotten."⁹ In His divine plan, God Father not only gave humanity His only begotten Son as the Way, but He also gave man another example of virtue - the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her role is of the upmost importance primarily because she simply lived in total union and dependence of the will of God. Her example teaches man how to live, how to trust in the love of God. She served the Apostles, the Petrine principle, she helped them, guided them...served them who fulfilled the establishment of the Church that Christ began; she was at their disposal, at their service but above all sustained them in prayer. In the same way, she guides humanity, showing the way to her Beloved Son.

"If then the most Blessed Virgin is the Mother at once of God and men, who can doubt that she will work with all diligence to procure that Christ, Head of the Body of the Church (*Coloss. i., 18*), may transfuse His gifts into us, His members, and above all that of knowing Him and living through Him (*I John iv., 9*)?"¹⁰ The Blessed Mother, not only points the way to her Son, but also intercedes on behalf of humanity before her Son. She mediates the graces mankind needs facilitating the conferring of graces. For God who could have man Himself man without her, chose to make Himself man in and through her; and thus He received all of His humanity from her. He gave Himself completely through her man should therefore give himself completely to Jesus through Mary. St. Louis de Montfort says, "Through Mary salvation came into our world and through Mary we can experience the fullness of this same salvation which is nothing less than a total sharing, a profound participation, in the life of Jesus Christ."¹¹

"She [Mary] is an echo of God, speaking and repeating only God. If you say "Mary" she says 'God'."

¹ Ephesians 4:15-16

² Summa Theologiae, Saint Thomas Aquinas, III. q7, a11

³ John 1:16-17

⁴ Blessed John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Aeterna Dei Sapientia*, no. 37

⁵ Blessed John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Aeterna Dei Sapientia*, no. 37

⁶ Blessed John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 7

⁷ Mark 6:7

⁸ Matthew 16:18

⁹ Summa theologiae, III, q.7, a.10, ad 1.

¹⁰ Pope Pius X, Encyclical Letter *Ad Diem Illum Laetissimum*, no. 11

¹¹ Saint Louis de Montfort

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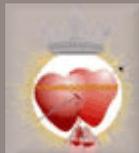
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Saint Louis de Montfort

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