

## Graces

“Of the kindness of the Lord the earth is full” (Ps 33:5). According to Wikipedia, grace is the benevolence shown by God toward humankind in the form of an undeserved benefit or assistance.

God endows His faithful with innumerable graces. After the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph obtained the most graces. One of the greatest graces he received was the fact that he was chosen by God to be the husband of the Blessed Virgin. As a husband to the Virgin, he became a companion in her life, a witness of her virginity, and the guardian of her honor (cf. FILAS, F.L.: *St. Joseph After Vatican II*, p. 27). Since this union was a genuine marriage, Joseph possessed all the rights and obligations of a husband, and moreover, the title of “father of Jesus”. This title was applied to him not only by those who were ignorant of Christ’s origin, “When Jesus began his ministry he was about thirty years of age. He was the son, as was thought, of Joseph” (Lk 3:23), and “Is he not the carpenter’s son?” (Mt 13:55), but also by His first disciples, “We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth” (Jn 1:45), and by his wife, the Blessed Virgin, “Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I ...” (Lk 2:48). Joseph’s greatest honor as “father of Jesus” arose from the condescension of the Eternal Father in heaven, who bestowed the title on him. The Eternal Father manifested His love for St. Joseph by entrusting him with the double office of husband of Mary and legal father of Jesus. St. Bernard writes that Joseph was the father of the family whom the Eternal Father gave as a spouse to the Mother of God and

as a father to His Son. Joseph accepted this grace and developed it by silently and faithfully carrying out God's plan on earth. Therefore, God "made him lord of his house and ruler of all his possessions" (Ps 105:21). In God's house, where God's family, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, lived were gathered the whole court of heaven and earth with the innumerable angels and people that God has created. The head of the family was Joseph, who sustained it with bread by the sweat of his brow (cf. CHORPENNING, J.F.: *Just Man, Husband of Mary, Guardian of Christ*, p. 131).

No less, grace that is worthy of deep meditation is the bond of love that existed between Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Jesus was God incarnate, fulfilling most perfectly His duty as the adoptive son of Joseph. Our Lady, the most perfect creature that ever existed, was Joseph's wife. She, too, loved her husband unselfishly. Jesus and Mary honored Joseph for the protection he gave them.

What a great grace it was for Joseph, who became the only human being who ever received the filial love of Jesus Christ and the all-chaste conjugal love of the Blessed Virgin! Joseph lived in an intimate relationship with Jesus and Mary. He and no one else had the privilege to enter into the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God by silently accepting Mary, who was with child, in his house. What a grace! Day after day he saw God in human flesh as well as the life of her, who was without flaw. Daily he had the privilege of working for Jesus and Mary.

After the birth of Jesus, it was a wonderful grace for Joseph to live constantly in the actual presence of God. For Joseph, the man according to the Heart of his foster son, the company of

Jesus and Mary led him to the heights of union with God. Certainly, Jesus prayed a lot for His silent and generous guardian, because Joseph wore himself out in the personal service of Christ Himself. That is a great grace when Christ prays for someone personally. Likewise Our Lady, whose intercession has never been fruitless, prayed for Joseph. The Blessed mediatrix of grace could not fail to obtain the greatest of graces for the man to whom she was deeply indebted and whom she loved most dearly next to God. No husband in the world has been nor ever will be more loved by his wife than Joseph was loved by Mary, and no husband has benefited more from a wife's prayers than Joseph (cf. *ibid*, p. 121).

The Gospels point to the graces which Joseph received: nobility of character and his union with God. No man but Joseph, thoroughly schooled in the virtues of faith, obedience, chastity, and humility, could have carried out the exacting duties of the head of the Holy Family. He fulfilled his duty instantly and with uncomplaining obedience (cf. FILAS, F.L.: *The Man Nearest to Christ*, p. 86-89).

St. Joseph is called the "Patron of happy death". He received the grace to die in the arms of Jesus, who was called "Joseph's son", and the arms of Mary who was full of grace.

In the disputation about Joseph's consecration in his mother's womb, the Scriptures and the tradition of the Church are silent. However, there is no doubt that Joseph received every gift he needed to execute his task perfectly. Yet he carried this task in silence. "The mystery of the life of this Saint, has been hidden from the beginning, God has never seen fit to reveal to us the nature of those gifts and graces" (*ibid*, p. 90).

Certainly, one of the greatest graces was also the one about

which a Jesuit, Father Francis Suarez, writes: “I will not neglect to call attention to the rather general belief that it is probable that this Saint gloriously reigns with Christ in soul and body. Since he died before Christ, it is very likely that he was one of those who arose at the time of the resurrection of Christ and who – as many believe – passed on to the immortal life of the soul and body” (*ibid*, p. 90).

The life of Alphonse Marie was rich with graces and supernatural gifts. She says, “The greatest grace that the Savior can give a soul is that of finding her worthy to follow in His footsteps” (LUTTENAUER, J.: *Thoughts of Mother Alphonse*, p. 21). From an early age, God blessed Alphonse Marie with extraordinary graces because the soul of this child very early understood the mystery of the cross and was sensitive and compassionate with the suffering of Christ. God embraced her by His grace so that she lived in His presence. In her desire to know and love Him more and more, she practiced in prayer. The festive day of her first Holy Communion was an immense grace for her. Perhaps you are not aware that today the children receiving their first Holy Communion are rather looking forward to gifts and festive activities. Alphonse Marie, however, was looking solely to her Savior present in the Eucharist. She ignored earthly things related to the celebration, because she had experienced heaven, for which in silence she praised God, thanking Him for this great grace. It was a sacrifice for her to be in tumult among the others; she would have liked to have been alone with her God. Her soul, as a living throne of God, was deeply moved and filled with joy (cf. PERRIN, J. M.: *The Life of Mother Alphonse-Marie*, p. 13).

Suffering was a source of God's graces for this gracious soul. Her path of suffering was a path of grace, inner joy and a preparation for the work the Lord predestined her to do so. By meditating on the passion of Christ, she felt the desire to give herself completely and utterly to God. From the beginning, however, she was worried if she would be worthy of the grace to walk a life of chastity and renunciation by sacrificing to God. Yet kneeling under the cross, she asked her Savior to be worthy of this great grace. Her spirit was preoccupied with continual thinking of God. She says, "A God-loving soul is always preoccupied and conversing with her Bridegroom; for one can only know by this way, whether one loves Jesus; because one is always preoccupied and conversing with the one whom one loves. Therefore a soul can only find out if she loves her Bridegroom, when she is constantly in His presence, and this is the best way of showing Him her love. In a very short time, this soul will rise to a high stage of perfection, because through the presence of God everything becomes light and bearable for her. Is there a lovelier company than the one with Jesus? And see the kindness and mercy of God! He, the highest Lord of heaven and earth, desires from miserable creatures that they may converse with Him and be preoccupied with Him! Oh what marvelous grace isn't it, that you are considered to be occupied and to converse with such a great and magnificent Lord" (HÉRISSARD, D.: *Rekindle the Gift of God that Is Within You*, I p. 26).

The Lord often encouraged Alphonse Marie to ask for graces, "Pray without ceasing and always have My name and the name of my Mother on your lips, for I am determined to grant you many graces through the intercession of my Mother." Here we

also see that the Lord Himself points to the Blessed Virgin as a mediatrix of all graces. “Finally, pray especially for those graces of which you stand in greatest need, and never ask for anything in the natural order, except what can serve my glory and the well being of your neighbor” (PERRIN, J. M.: *The Life of Mother Alphonse-Marie*, p. 24).

For Alphonse Marie, ecstasies were a source of great suffering and as well as of the graces. St. John of the Cross writes, “Actually, ecstasies are at times accompanied by suffering, greater and more violent than any other suffering of human nature; a suffering so convulsive as to threaten human life itself, which without a special grace of God would be destroyed” (*ibid*, p. 36). However, not only was Alphonse Marie herself embraced by God’s immense graces, but God also endowed other people with His graces through her. Her spiritual director writes, “I believe that this virgin..., who suffers like a martyr receives these revelations only in order to pray for and call down particular graces for the Church and for souls recommended to her” (*ibid*, p. 30). Professors Fitch and Schirlin write, “What are the goals that God seeks in giving this poor virgin such gifts? Perhaps He wants to console in suffering, ... to edify those who come to her for counsel ..., or give her prayers more power at a time when the political and religious world is shaken in its foundation and once again is trying to find its bearings. Why is it given to her to see in depth the great events that take place on the world’s stage, and so often to see the representative of Jesus Christ, who is sent to give freedom again to the faithful in the name and in the power of the Divine Master? We think that all this happens not in the personal interest of the poor virgin, but rather in our interest

and through us in the interest of the public” (*ibid*, p. 31).

One of the greatest graces Alphonse Marie received was one that she longed for for many years: to become a religious sister. She also received the grace to found a congregation. She says to her followers, “What a great grace it is to receive a vocation to a religious life” (MOTHER ALPHONSE MARIE: *Exhortations*, p. 1). During her Investment, she said, “My most ardent wish is that while I nurse the sick, day and night keep watch at the bedside of the poor, and assist and support them in their misery, I may attain the perfection of the religious state. For this I need the assistance of grace and the protection of the saints. I hope that the all merciful God will, upon my constant petition, grant me both” (PERRIN, J. M.: *The Life of Mother Alphonse-Marie*, p. 83). And the Lord granted the graces she asked for. He said to her, “I will always be by you with My grace... I will pour out the riches of grace in great abundance upon this Order... My daughter, you will have to suffer during your whole life, but you will always be given enough strength to direct this work. I will act. You must suffer and be silent. You must die to self so that you may be better disposed to receive My graces... It is not St. Alphonsus but St. Joseph who is the protector of this house. This Order will receive many graces through his intercession, yes, very special graces. In order to guide and direct this Congregation, you will receive the same graces as St. Teresa” (*ibid*, p. 53, 56, 60, 62). St. Joseph was not outdone in generosity. He became the protector and provider for the Congregation. He quietly but steadily stirred the hearts of the people to donate to build the new house for the Sisters. God blessed the building of the new house, “the house of the Lord”, which He Himself had placed under the

patronage and protection of St. Joseph. What treasures of grace were poured out upon the Congregation and upon humanity from this place! God strengthened His servant and constantly rekindled her enthusiasm through special graces that allowed her to see the future of her work.

Alphonse Marie passed on to her followers what she had experienced, “God usually allows those souls for whom He has reserved great graces, to pass through such severe trials. Total and perfect self-knowledge is one of these graces. It is in this moment that the soul begins to recognize her nothingness, her evil inclinations, her weaknesses, and her vanity. It is in this moment that she notices all the vain attachments of her heart and how, even in spiritual things, she seeks her own satisfaction. What a grace, my beloved children! Is there a more important one for salvation? Perhaps you too have already experienced that it is usually the grace of interior trials” (MOTHER ALPHONSE MARIE: *Exhortations*, p. 30).

*Living in God's presence is the greatest grace one can receive here on earth and then in eternity. Regardless of the effort, let us try to love God above all, because in this way we will ensure eternal bliss.*