

THE YEAR OF GRACE

We know that God is good, that our God is a loving God. If we are fortunate, we have believed it all our lives. The Year of Grace, from Pentecost 2012 to Pentecost 2013, is a year for us to ponder these truths, a time to reflect on what we have received from our good and loving God, to reflect on how 'graced' we are.

It would help if we were to make some sort of a list of the graces we have received, of all that we are grateful for.

High on our list must come the gift of faith. Our faith is so precious to us. It comes to us from our family, parents, friends, community, teachers. It comes to us from hearing the Word of God, from the scriptures and through the Church teaching us.

It is especially in the Liturgy of the Word that we hear about and prepare to celebrate God's love for us in Christ. We learn to recognise how cared for we are, how much we are loved by God. As we ponder the story of the Good Shepherd, for instance, we come to know ourselves as protected by our God, that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, feels protective of us, against all the wolves and other menaces. We ponder the mystery of Jesus giving himself for us, how God loved the world—and us—so much that he gave his only Son.

As we ponder these mysteries we rejoice. Jesus wants us to rejoice: 'I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete' (John 15:11). He tells us also that we are to do more than enjoy our good fortune and celebrate all God's goodness and love for us. As God is generous to us, we must be generous to others.

So Jesus moves on in the following verse: 'This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you.' Jesus' call for us to 'love one another as I have loved you' can make us wonder. Does he really mean it? Isn't he setting the bar far too high? How can we love

with the divine completeness with which he has loved us?

But then, he is not asking anything other than what we have heard elsewhere: 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Matt. 5:48). The demands made of us are nothing if not consistent. And as we reflect on this new commandment and what are the helps—what are the graces—God gives us to enable us to obey it we are led to still more profound realisations of God's action in our lives.

When Jesus gives us a command he also gives us the capacity to do what he commands. So, we ask, what does God do for us and to us that makes us able to do what God commands?

We might start by thinking over our faith journey: how we have received from God mercy, pardon, reconciliation, and how God is enabling us to find healing and wholeness.

Still more amazing is what happened at our baptism: we became members of the Body of Christ and by God's grace became 'other Christs'. We received the gift of the Spirit, and became 'temples of the Holy Spirit' (1Cor. 3:16-17). We were adopted into the family of the Trinity. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit came and made their home in us, so that we participate in the life of the Trinity

By grace we are transformed so completely that since the earliest times this transformation has been called a true 'divinisation'.

St Irenaeus wrote: 'He (the Word) became human that we might become divine' (*Adversus Haereses*, IV, 28,1).

Pope Leo XIII taught in his encyclical *Divinum Illud* (1879):

By grace God abides in the just soul as in a temple, in a most intimate and singular manner...Now this wonderful union, which is properly called indwelling ... is most certainly produced by the divine presence of the whole Trinity: '...and we will come to them and make our home with them' (John 14:23); neverthe-

less it is attributed in a particular manner to the Holy Spirit.’ (As quoted in McBrien, *Catholicism*, p.180.)

Vatican II also taught that ‘The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful as in a temple.’ (*Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no.4.)

Being made God-like in this way we are enabled to carry out Jesus’ command to ‘Love one another as I have loved you’—to love as God loves, to love with the completeness that God loves us. God has given us the capacity to do it. Such is the wonder of grace.

As was affirmed in the Council of Trent

against the Reformers: God gives us the will to do and the power to do what God asks of us (*Decree on Justification*, Ch. XIII. 1547).

So we ponder and wonder at how God can transform us, and how God aims to make us God-like. And we pray for the grace to do what Jesus commands

The Year of Grace is a year for recognising how graced we are, for receiving God’s grace and for responding to what we have received, especially by celebrating how graced we are. A year is not too long a time for such a task.

—Barry Brundell MSC, Editor

GRACE

Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is *favour, the free and undeserved help* that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life.

Grace is a *participation in the life of God*. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life: by Baptism the Christian [...] receives the life of the Spirit who breathes charity into him and who forms the Church.

[...] Sanctifying grace is an habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love. [...]

Indeed, we also work, but we are only collaborating with God who works, for his mercy has gone before us. It has gone before us so that we may be healed, and follows us so that once healed, we may be given life; it goes before us so that we may be called, and follows us so that we may be glorified; it goes before us so that we may live devoutly, and follows us so that we may always live with God: for without him we can do nothing. (St Augustine, *De Natura Gratiae*, 31)

—(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1196-2001.)