

REFLECTION FOR March 18, 2018

How privileged we are to live in this time, the time of the New Covenant. We take it for granted. God offers us the possibility of close friendship with him and gives us his life, his grace, in abundance. Under the Old Covenant we would not even be his people since we are Gentiles, and not Jews. We would be among the pagans trying to find God in many different ways. But God has offered His New Covenant to all people, not just his Chosen People. **Thanks be to God for the New Covenant.** We approach God today with confidence, assured of his love for us, and his offer of life to us through the New Covenant.

The prophet Jeremiah, in our first reading (Jer 31:31-34), told how God would offer a new covenant because his people had broken the first one. **God's forgiveness would be the characteristic of the new covenant.** The first covenant was written on the two stone tablets which Moses brought down Mount Sinai (Ex 31:18; 32:15-16). But Jeremiah said the new covenant would be **written on our hearts** (Jer 31:33) and everyone would know the Lord (Jer 31:34). **This happens to us when we are baptized.** We receive God's life in us through the Holy Spirit as sanctifying grace. In the Old Covenant, the Jews received grace but in the New Covenant God offers us an abundance of grace because we receive grace each and **every time** we receive the sacraments. **Grace means we have God's life in us.** Therefore, we are indeed God's sons and daughters since baptism. As Jeremiah predicted God offered us a new covenant, and that new covenant is **written on our hearts** with sanctifying grace through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we know the Lord through faith. Sanctifying grace remains with us when we receive it at baptism and we receive sanctifying grace in abundance because we receive grace each time we receive each of the sacraments. Because of sanctifying grace **we are in friendship with God.** When we have sanctifying grace we are in a "state of grace." It means we are friends with God. If we commit serious sin we lose sanctifying grace but when we turn to God again our friendship with God is restored along with sanctifying grace. The New Testament reminds us of this sanctifying grace; **with it God is dwelling in us and we in God:**

Whoever acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, **God remains in him and he in God.** We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. (1 John 4:15-16)

Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? (1 Cor 3:16)

What is the source of this sanctifying grace of the new covenant? All grace comes from **Jesus on the cross.** We heard this in our second reading from the letter to the Hebrews,

he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Heb 5:9)

The Gospel tells us how Jesus became the source of eternal salvation for us as follows:

Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. (John 12:24).

And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself (John 12:32).

Jesus is that **grain of wheat** that fell into the ground and died and produced much fruit and that fruit is the life of God in our souls, **sanctifying grace**. Jesus was foretelling the salvation and grace we would receive through his passion and death. **All grace comes from the cross**, because Jesus was lifted up from the earth. Every time we receive a sacrament, grace flows to us from Calvary.

John gives a beautiful detail at the end of his account of Jesus' death that we do not find in Matt, Mark or Luke. One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a lance and immediately blood and water flowed out (John 19:34). The strange thing is that John then makes a big deal out of this blood and water flowing from Jesus' side. John says an eyewitness testifies to this, he himself, and he writes this that we may believe (John 19:35). Why did John and the early Church consider it so important that we believe that blood and water flowed from the side of Jesus? **Because the early Church saw the blood and water as symbols of the Church and sacraments** - especially the **Eucharist and Baptism** - and that **Christ gave us the sacraments from the cross**.

The old covenant was written on tablets of stone. God offered us a new covenant as Jeremiah predicted, and the new covenant is **written on our hearts** with **sanctifying grace through the Holy Spirit**. We know the Lord through faith. Sanctifying grace remains with us when we receive it at baptism and we receive sanctifying grace in abundance because we receive grace each time we receive the sacraments. Because of sanctifying grace we are in friendship with God. And all of this grace comes to us because Jesus was lifted up from the earth to draw us to himself, or like a grain of wheat, fell in the earth, died, and produced much fruit, the life of grace in our souls.