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THE GREATER LIFE

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INTRODUCTION

Life exists in abundance! It is practically everywhere. And the mere sight of plants and animals growing and moving about reminds me of the indisputable fact that life pervades the whole of reality. And yet this feeling of wonderment pales in comparison to the beauty of the human person who is capable of doing things that are beyond the reach of other living creatures. Indeed, life does not only exist in abundance; life is beautiful. But then how on earth did all things come to be? Why is there life at all? Where does it come from? Where is it headed to? These questions are important inasmuch as they lead us to the most basic question: *What is the essence of life?*

The Catholic Church teaches that God is the ultimate source of life. Not only that; He is Life itself! God is the essence of life, and life is the essence of God. Life exists because God exists, and He cannot be otherwise but be alive. Thus, we believe that within and beyond this profusion of life lies God who is the source, the ground and the end of life. But more importantly, this God invites each and every one of us to live a life of communion with Him – a life beyond this life.

Life is a true *locus theologicus*. It is a venue where one can meet God and grow in the knowledge of Him. I myself could not help but be amazed at the thought that there must be something more than what my senses could perceive. Life, in its totality and intricate details, continues to fascinate me even today. And so for this reason, I have chosen *life* as the unifying theme of my theological synthesis, which is encapsulated in this brief statement: *God, the “giver” and “sustainer” of life, invites man to the “fullness of life.”* I have divided my paper into three chapters: God, the Giver of Life [CHAPTER 1]; God, the Sustainer of Life [CHAPTER 2] and God, the Fullness of Life [CHAPTER 3].

CHAPTER 1 [**God, the Giver of Life**] talks about the life of God in eternity, and how creation is nothing but that which flows from this abundant life. In all of creation, however, man stands as God’s masterpiece inasmuch as he is destined to a life of communion with Him. Although man rejected this offer, and died because of sin, God never gave up on man. He promised him salvation through self-revelation which was fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus, thus redeeming him back to life.

CHAPTER 2 [**God, the Sustainer of Life**] talks about the life-sustaining presence of the Holy Spirit who dwells in the Church. This same Spirit sustains and will bring to completion Jesus’ work of redemption for man in the Church, especially through the sacraments. This Spirit gives and particularly sustains life through the sacraments of initiation. He restores life through the sacraments of healing. And finally, He promotes sharing of life through the sacraments of vocation.

CHAPTER 3 [**God, the Fullness of Life**] talks about God’s invitation to man to a life of communion with Him, which is seen in his unquenchable desire for life and happiness. Man responds to this invitation by loving God and others, and is destined to experience this fullness of life with God in heaven. However, this fullness of life should be conceived of as an experience that already begins here on earth as its foundation. Finally, in this regard, man finds in the Blessed Virgin Mary, the outstanding model of love, and the assurance of a life of communion with God in eternity.

CHAPTER 1 GOD, THE GIVER OF LIFE

“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

– Revelation 4:11

God is the “giver of life” for two reasons. Firstly, He is the source of everything that lives or exists. Secondly, He alone can give to man the fullness of life that he continually seeks. Indeed, life comes from God. Without Him nothing can ever come to be. With Him, however, man can only experience life to the fullest. In this chapter, we shall see how this ultimate source of existence, who is God, has not only given us life in creation, but has also restored this life through the redemptive act of Jesus Christ.

God as Life-Overflowing

The Superabundant Life of God in Eternity

Life on earth is abundant. You go everywhere, and you will always see living things around. In fact, even in the desert where there seems to be no sign of life, still you would find one. Why is there such an abundance of life? Where does it come from? Today, scientists claim that life began from a simple organism some 3.5 billion years ago.¹ And yet there seems to be no clear answer as to where this living thing comes from. The fact is, even if science will continue to discover new pieces of information in the future, it will never be able to answer with exactness questions that concern the ultimate origin of life. It is beyond its scope. And so, it will never be able to answer the question: Where does everything come from?

We believe that everything comes from God. For God is the ultimate source of existence and life. But then we ask: Who is God? What do we know about Him? Inasmuch as God is infinitely beyond us, we can never comprehend completely who He is. We can never speak fully about Him. Nevertheless, there are things that we know about God, not only because we have the capacity to discover Him, but also because, and even more importantly, He has revealed Himself to us.

In the book of Exodus, when Moses asks for His name, God replies by saying that His name is “I AM” (cf. Ex 3:13-14). Here, we realize that God is one who is present everywhere and always. Thus we can also say that it is His very nature to live. Indeed, God’s life is life to the infinite level. Even more, He, Himself, is Life (cf. Jn 14:6). And without this Life, nothing can ever live or exist.²

¹ Cf. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/10445788/Oldest-signs-of-life-on-earth-found.html> ; accessed on February 22, 2014.

² Cf. John Paul II, *A Catechesis on the Creed: God, Father and Creator* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1996), 199 – 207.

Now, this God, whose very nature is “to live,” is unique. No other being like Him exists. For, how can we conceive of the existence of “another-God” when such a position runs in contradiction to the concept of God whose life is boundless? This uniqueness of God is, in fact, affirmed in the book of Deuteronomy when He, Himself, says that there is no other God besides Him (cf. Deut 32:39). This belief is proclaimed whenever we recite the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed wherein we confess that “we believe in one God,” which means that we “firmly believe and confess without reservation that there is only one true God, eternal, infinite and unchangeable, incomprehensible, almighty and ineffable.”³

But what is even more astounding about God is the fact that He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁴ There are Three Persons in one God. Here, we are entering into the inmost life of God; a mystery that we would not have known had it not been revealed to us by Jesus, Himself (cf. Mt 28:19).⁵ And so, understandably, we ask: How is this possible? How is one equal to three? Indeed it seems absurd, but true. In fact, not a few brilliant minds, especially in the past, have succumbed to heresies or heretical ideas in trying to understand this unfathomable mystery. Among the many heresies was Arianism, which was particularly strong sometime in the fourth century. It upheld the idea that since there is only one God, who is the Father; the Son and the Holy Spirit were considered to be mere creatures. This heresy, along with many others, gave birth to the first two ecumenical councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), wherein the Son was proclaimed as “consubstantial” with the Father, and the Holy Spirit as one and equal with the Father and the Son.⁶ This means that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. The Three Persons are equal in nature. And so even if the Son manifested Himself clearly in the Incarnation, and the Holy Spirit at the Pentecost, they both, together with the Father, exist in eternity. They have no beginning or end.

So, how then do we explain this existence of God in eternity? In other words, what do they do in eternity? In our own terms, we could say that God is in a dynamic sharing of unlimited life within Himself! In eternity, the Father, whose very nature is to

³ Lateran Council IV (1215) as quoted from J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* [hereafter cited as *ND*] (New York: Alba House, 2001), no. 19.

⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁵ In this text, the “personal distinction is clearer in the Greek, where the conjunction “*kai*” and the article are repeated before the name of each person. This emphatic repetition of the article cannot be explained except by the real distinction between the persons. Moreover, the Father is not the Son, since these are personal nouns and not impersonal nouns, like truth, goodness, wisdom, which indicate divine attributes pertaining to the divine nature. . . . Lastly, the text implies the divinity of these three persons, like the baptismal grace bestowed in their name, cannot be conferred except in the name of God, and thus in this formula the same worship of latria is given to the three persons.” Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Trinity and God the Creator: A Commentary on St. Thomas’ Theological Summa, Ia, q. 27 – 119*, trans. Frederic Eckhoff (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1952), 29.

⁶ Cf. *ND*, no. 304 – 305.

generate life, shares His whole self to His Son.⁷ The Son, on the other hand, being a complete self-giving image of the Father, inasmuch as He received the Father's whole self, also gives His whole self back to the Father. Finally, this eternally dynamic sharing of life between the Father and the Son is He whom we call the Holy Spirit. In this regard, the general council of Florence, in the *Decree for the Copts* (1442), speaks of the Father, who is not begotten, begetting the Son; and the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son.⁸

We should however be careful in upholding the oneness of the Three Persons, lest we fall into heresies that deny their distinction. In the third century, there was this belief that since God is one, He cannot be three. And so, the Three Persons were considered to be mere modes of one God. God became the Father; then He became the Son; then finally, He became the Holy Spirit. This heresy is known as Modalism.⁹ Here, it has to be clarified that, although they are one in the divine nature, “the Father is not the Son or the Holy Spirit; the Son is not the Father or the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is not the Father or the Son.”¹⁰ We can observe this distinction in the baptism of Jesus. Here, we see that all three—(1) Jesus, (2) the Spirit of God and (3) the voice—are distinct from each other (cf. Mt 3:16). Their distinction, however, is not in their divine nature, but, in their relationships which relate them to one another.¹¹ Moreover, these relationships “do not simply distinguish the persons from each other – they are the persons. In the technical language of the schools they are subsistent relationships.”¹²

But, even if the Three Persons are distinct, and, although, each one shows forth what is proper to Him in the Trinity, still they act as one.¹³ And so, while we attribute creation to the Father, being the origin of life, we must never forget that the Son, through whom all things came to be (cf. Jn 1:3), and the Holy Spirit, whom we profess as “the giver of life,” were both part of that act of creation, too. The same can be said of Jesus' work of redemption and the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification. In other words, in whatever each one does, the other two are equally involved. For, “the Father is wholly in the Son and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Son wholly in the Father and wholly in the Holy Spirit; the Holy Spirit is wholly in the Father and wholly in the Son.”¹⁴ Consequently, in God, everything “is one where there is no opposition of relationship.”¹⁵

Now, this God—who is one in three distinct persons—is so dynamically and infinitely alive, that, in eternity, He decides to share this superabundant life outside of

⁷ Cf. General Council of Florence, *Decree for the Greeks* (1439) as taken from *ND*, no. 323.

⁸ Cf. *ND*, no. 325.

⁹ Cf. Bernard Pault, *What is the Trinity*, trans., Rosemary Haughton (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1959), 99-100.

¹⁰ General Council of Florence, *Decree for the Copts* as quoted from *ND*, no. 325.

¹¹ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [hereafter cited as *CCC*] (Manila: Word & Life Publications, 1994), no. 255.

¹² Edmund Hill, *The Mystery of the Trinity* (London: Cassell Ltd., 1985), 93.

¹³ Cf. *CCC*, no. 267.

¹⁴ *Decree for the Copts: ND*, no. 326.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 325.

Himself; an act of sharing on the part of God which gave birth to everything. From a Christian's point of view, this is what creation is all about. For, indeed, the term "creation," taken in its totality, refers to that which flows from God's "uncontainable" life within Himself.

Creation as the Sharing of God's Life with Man as its Masterpiece

Those who do not believe in God think that everything happened by chance. But is this really the case? We, Christians, believe that everything is created by God. For it is God who gives life to all things (cf. 1 Tim 6:13). But what do we mean by "creation?" As a verb, it refers to "the act whereby in sovereign freedom and out of nothing God has brought about and constantly maintains in existence all that exists."¹⁶ As a noun, it refers to that which is created by God – the result of the act. In the second consideration of the word "creation," we can, therefore, speak of it as that which flows out of God's superabundant life. Thus everything that exists is the result of God's sharing of His life to us. Creation, in this sense, however, should be distinguished from emanationism, which somehow connotes necessity of creation.¹⁷ It is not out of necessity that God created us. No. God created us out of His own freedom and initiative.¹⁸ Therefore, creation should be understood in the sense that everything that exists or lives or breathes comes from and is willed by God who is the source of existence and life.

But how did God create everything that exists? How did creation come about? The Bible tells us that God created the world in six days (cf. Gen 1:1-27). How can this be when the theory of evolution tells us that it took billions of years before the first sign of life on earth began? Moreover, we humans only came about half a million years ago.¹⁹ Does this mean that what the Bible tells us is false? Of course, it is not. For while evolution tells us how the "world" was created; the Bible tells us who created it, and why it was created. In this regard, Pope Benedict XVI explains to us that there is no contradiction between the theory of evolution and the story of creation in the Bible. In fact, they complement each other.

We cannot say: creation or evolution, inasmuch as these two things respond to two different realities. The story of the dust of the earth and the breath of God . . . does not in fact explain how human persons come to be but rather what they are. It explains their inmost origin and casts light on the project that they are. And vice versa, the theory of evolution seeks to understand and describe biological

¹⁶ Gerald O'Collins and Edward G. Farrugia, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, (Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2010), 56.

¹⁷ Cf. O'Collins, *Dictionary of Theology*, 74.

¹⁸ Cf. CCC., no. 295.

¹⁹ Cf. Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: A Short History of Everybody for the Last 13,000 Years* (Great Britain: Vintage, 2005), 37.

development. But in doing so it cannot explain where the “project” of human persons comes from, not their inner origin, not their particular nature.²⁰

But why did God create the world? The Church has taught us that “the world was made for the glory of God.”²¹ This, however, does not mean incompleteness or imperfection in God. For according to St. Bonaventure, it is not to increase His glory, but to show it forth and communicate it.²² No wonder why St. Irenaeus said that “the glory of God is man alive.”²³ For when man lives his life according to God’s plan, he becomes a true reflection of God’s glory. But then again we might ask: Why did God want to communicate His glory? We can answer this question by comparing it with our own experience as human beings. We observe from experience that when we are happy, we cannot radiate sadness or dullness. We, of course, radiate joy to others, who are then influenced by our lively presence. In a similar way, but to an infinitely greater degree, God, whose life is limitlessly abounding, radiates this life outside of His inner self, which gave birth to the creation of all things.

Now, of all God’s visible creation, no one is more blessed than man. Being created in the “image of God,” only man is called to share in God’s own divine life. This means that only man is called to be in a loving relationship with God. It is for this end that man was created, which is also the fundamental reason for his dignity. Therefore, unlike any other creature, only man has the capacity to know and love God.²⁴ And so, all the things that exist were created by God for the sake of man; so that man may respond to God’s love by serving and loving Him in return, and by offering all creation back to Himself.²⁵

Accordingly, man is different in all of creation inasmuch as he is a being at once corporeal and spiritual. This means that while he has a body, he also has a soul. This is symbolically portrayed in Genesis 2:7 when the Lord breathed life to man.²⁶ This soul, which is the source of life in him, is different from the “soul” of a plant or an animal. This soul is immortal.²⁷ It cannot die. Nevertheless, the body also shares in the dignity of the “image of God.” Concerning this matter, Blessed John Paul II, speaking of the importance of the body, in his *Theology of the Body*, explains that, “The body alone, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and

²⁰ Benedict XVI, *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, trans., Boniface Ramsey, O.P. (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 50.

²¹ Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius* as quoted from *ND*, no. 418.

²² Cf. *CCC*, no. 293.

²³ St. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* IV, 20, 7 as quoted from *The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325: Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1, The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*, eds. Alexander Roberts, D.D. and James Donaldson, LL.D. (USA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 490.

²⁴ Cf. Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 12.

²⁵ Cf. *CCC*, no. 358.

²⁶ Cf. *Ibid*, no. 362.

²⁷ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 14.

the divine.”²⁸ Indeed, both body and soul are important and are so united that their union forms a single human person.

Now, when God created man, He created “him” as male and female. Physically and physiologically, a human being is either a man or a woman. However, despite the differences between the two, both man and woman are, nevertheless, equal in dignity as persons – as beings created in the “image of God.” Also, as man and woman, human beings are naturally meant for each other through their differences. For, indeed, there is no suitable partner for a man, but a woman (cf. Gen 2:20). Moreover, these differences must be respected and nurtured so that both man and woman may truly complement each other for the good of the human race.

The first man and woman lived in paradise where they were both called to transmit this life to their descendants (cf. Gen 1:28). Being given the task to “subdue the earth” (Gen 1:28), they were also called to offer the whole of creation back to God, by making good use of them and not abusing them. More importantly, they were to stay in communion with God in that place as long as they remain true to who they are – as creatures who were made in the “image of God.”

From this, we can say that the account of creation in Genesis reminds us that the life that we have, along with all the other things that exist, belongs to God. We, human beings, are merely stewards, not owners of everything. Also, created in the “image of God” the first man and woman have been called to transmit the life that God has given them not only through human generation, but also through their actions that lead to the preservation of life on earth and the true development of the human race. Such was the plan of God in the beginning. Man was to be in constant communion with God. And as long as he remained in the divine intimacy, man would not have to suffer or die (cf. Gen 2:17; 3:16, 19).²⁹

Man’s Death and Redemption to Life

The Fall of Man and the Promise of Salvation

Looking at the world today, we realize how far we have gone from the original plan of God. While many good things are still happening, we cannot dismiss the fact that there is evil almost everywhere. In different degrees, we experience division, corruption, war, hunger and the ever-spreading culture against life. And yet a deeper reflection leads us to the realization that this evil that we see outside is a mere reflection of what is inside in each one of us.

In man himself many elements wrestle with one another. Thus on the one hand, as a creature he experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways. On the other, he feels himself to be boundless in his desires and summoned to a higher

²⁸ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 203.

²⁹ Cf. CCC, nos. 372 – 376.

life. Pulled by manifold attractions, he is constantly forced to choose among them and to renounce some. Indeed, as a weak and sinful being, he often does what he would not, and fails to do what he would. Hence he suffers from internal divisions, and from these flow so many and such great discords in society.³⁰

We see evil in our individual sins and in our sinful social structures.³¹ We are often drawn towards what is wrong and sunk in many evils which cannot come from our good Creator; and seek to attain our goal apart from Him.³² And so we ask, “How can God say that everything is very good (cf. Gen 1:31) when almost every day we encounter evil?” Where does evil come from? In order to answer this question, we have to go back to where it all began – at the time of creation.

In the beginning, despite the fact that he is the high point of creation, man disobeyed God. But here we might ask: If man was in communion with God, why did he do such thing? Was there something lacking? Well, despite the fact that there was abounding goodness in creation, when man was in a perfect state in the beginning, evil already existed through Satan, who, along with the other angels who joined him, rejected God. It did not take long before their rebellion finally affected and destroyed man. But why did God allow such thing to happen to man? He allowed such thing “so that [man] might of his own accord seek his creator and freely attain his full and blessed perfection by cleaving to him.”³³ For only in freedom can love truly flourish. St. Thomas, in this regard, reasons that, “God permits evil in order to draw forth some greater good . . . Thus the Exultet sings, ‘O happy fault . . . which gained for us so great a Redeemer!’”³⁴ Indeed, man’s freedom was put to the test. And he failed. Man failed by not recognizing the fact that there is a limit to his freedom. For, even if he is the high point of creation, still he is a creature who is necessarily dependent on his Creator.

Now, what does this first sin, otherwise known as the original sin, consist of? In the Scriptures, it is symbolically portrayed as the act of eating the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:17). We believe that it consists in not trusting God, and in disobeying His will. When the devil tempted the first woman, he tried to persuade her by making her doubt God’s goodness. When the woman gave in to the temptation of Satan, she in turn disobeyed God’s command. The word “original sin” can mean two things: (1) the “originating sin” and (2) the “originated sin.” Originating sin refers to the first personal sin of our first parents “which brought evil and brokenness into the world.” The “originated sin” refers to the actual sinful state into which we are born as evidenced in our inclination to do evil—known as concupiscence—and the outside sinful situation.³⁵

³⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 10.

³¹ Cf. Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines. *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Manila: Paulines Publishing House, 1992), no. 82.

³² Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 13.

³³ *Ibid.*, no. 17.

³⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (London: Blackfriars with Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1976), III, 1, 3.

³⁵ Cf. Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines, *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (Manila: Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, 2008), no. 401.

Man's sin cost him his life of communion with God. He died in his sin. And the supernatural life that he received from God was lost. In this way, we can say that man died. Yes, he was alive physically, but he was spiritually dead inasmuch as he was cut off from communion with God. And because he lost the lifeline that he had, which was his communion with God, he also lost communion with others and with the rest of creation. This is explained by the text "they realized they were naked" (Gen 3:7). Concerning this passage, John Paul II explains, in his *Theology of the Body*, that this realization refers to the sense of shame of our first parents after their disobedience; shame from the realization that they had fallen from God's grace.³⁶ Also, Benedict XVI speaks of original sin as the destruction of relationality which affects everyone since it has its roots in the very beginning.³⁷

The good news is, "God, who is rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4) continued to care for man. He would not let man remain in that sinful state that he was in. God wanted man to come to life again, that is, to live a life of communion with Him. And so, immediately after the fall, God promised man a savior who would reconcile him back to Himself (cf. Gen 3:15). This salvation consists in the revelation of God's love for man, and in man's loving response to God. Indeed, God wants to reveal Himself and to make known the mystery of His will, so that man may, in turn, share in His divine nature (cf. 2 Pt 1:4).³⁸

This promise of salvation, began in the Old Testament through the choosing of the patriarchs and the announcement of the prophets. It is a promise to bring back the life which was there in the beginning, but was lost due to sin. God first promised Abraham that He would make him into a great nation (cf. Gen 12:2). Then came Moses and the prophets who considered Him as the only "living and true God, as a provident Father and just judge."³⁹ Later on, the Israelites, to whom the promise was revealed, would recognize that this salvation would come through a savior who will rescue them from their predicament. We, Christians, believe that this savior is none other than Jesus Christ Himself (cf. Mt 16:16).

The Fulfillment of Man's Redemption in Jesus

As mentioned in the previous section, Jesus is the savior promised by God to all mankind. But the question is: Who is Jesus? To answer this question, we can start by affirming, in faith, that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16), whose mission was to save us from sin, and to reconcile us back to the Father. For, He, Himself, said: "I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10). And so, foreshadowed since the beginning of time (cf. Gen 3:15), He is the fulfillment of God's revelation and man's salvation, which culminated in the Paschal Mystery.⁴⁰

³⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, no. 26:5.

³⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, *In the Beginning*, 73.

³⁸ Cf. Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, no. 2.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 3.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Dei Verbum*, no. 2.

Here, it may be helpful to recall that when our first parents sinned, they also dragged the whole of humanity to sin, and thus suffer the same consequence as they did. Just like Adam and Eve, all human beings were cut off from a life of communion with God. Now, that first sin was so great that there was nothing we could ever do to reconcile ourselves back to Him. There was nothing we could ever do to bring back that life of communion with God. The initiative of forgiveness would have to come from God Himself, whom we have offended. Thus, we believe that God's act of forgiveness, by reaching out to man, is necessary for our salvation.

Prepared in the Old Testament through the patriarchs and the prophets, this redemption was fulfilled when God finally revealed Himself in Jesus. In this regard, the Letter to the Hebrews says:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. (Heb 1:1-2)

And so, at the appointed time, God's Son became man in Jesus Christ. This event is known as the mystery of the Incarnation. Its main purpose was to redeem man back to God. Here, however, we might ask: Is Incarnation really necessary? Why did the Son of God have to become man? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* enumerates the reasons for His Incarnation: (1) in order to save us by reconciling us to God, (2) so that we might know God's love, (3) to be our model of holiness, and (4) to make us partakers of the divine nature. Aside from the conviction that God knows what He is doing, I think that, since man's salvation necessarily includes his response to God's initiative, it is indispensable that man will have to understand and feel God's forgiveness and love. To be understood, however, by man, God would have to speak in a way that is understandable to man. For Him to do that, God would have to become man like us.

The mystery of the Incarnation is important for our salvation on two accounts. Firstly, through the Incarnation in Jesus, God opened Himself to man. God has forgiven man; and He has, definitively, communicated this reality to him. Secondly, through this mystery, Jesus has shown us the way through which we can enter into communion with God. On the one hand, Jesus showed us God's immeasurable love for us. On the other hand, He has shown us how to love God in return. Thus Jesus did not only reveal the Father to us; He has also revealed to us our true identity. For, Jesus "fully reveals man to himself and brings light to his most high calling . . . He who is the 'image of the invisible God' (Col 1:15), is Himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which has been disfigured ever since the first sin."⁴¹

The whole life of Jesus, through His words and deeds, was a salvific act that has brought us all back to life. Everything that He did, throughout His entire life, was done for our own salvation. Nevertheless, this salvific act of Jesus finds its culmination in His death on the cross. For, it is in that moment that we find the clearest manifestation of God's unfathomable love for us. Consequently, it is also in that very moment that we find the most convincing proof that God has indeed forgiven us.

⁴¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22.

The fulfillment of Jesus' promise of salvation is confirmed by His own resurrection. For, by His resurrection, Jesus has shown us that He has conquered death itself. The empty tomb and those several apparitions to His disciples are signs that point to this historical, yet transcendent, reality. Moreover, the fact that the disciples were so convinced of it to the point of martyrdom is another sign that Jesus truly resurrected. For, surely, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of something that they were not strongly convinced of. Jesus' resurrection does not only set Him apart from the rest of those who claimed to be Israel's savior. More importantly, it has shown us that life awaits us after death.

Summary

Before proceeding to the next chapter, let us, first, have a recap of this one. Firstly, we have seen how everything that exists comes from God, whose very nature is existence and life. Secondly, we spoke of man as God's masterpiece in the whole of creation. Thirdly, we spoke of the fall of man and the promise of salvation by God. Fourthly, we spoke of Christ as the fulfillment of that promise. In one sentence, in this chapter, we spoke of God as the "giver of life" through His acts of creation and redemption. In the next chapter, we shall see how God sustains this life through the Holy Spirit, in the Catholic Church, especially by means of the sacraments.

CHAPTER 2 GOD, THE SUSTAINER OF LIFE

“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.”

– Romans 5:5

God is the “sustainer of life” inasmuch as the life of communion that was given by God to man in creation, which was restored in His Son’s Incarnation, is continued by the Holy Spirit’s work of sanctification in the Church, especially through the sacraments. Through the Holy Spirit, therefore, man receives the necessary graces in order to be able to live a life of communion with God – a life that will fully be accomplished in eternity.

The Presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church

The Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Life

We have already mentioned something about the Holy Spirit in the previous chapter where we talked about the life of the Trinity. We said that the Holy Spirit is the Third Person in the Most Holy Trinity. Thus we say that He is God, and though He is one with the Father and the Son, He is nevertheless, distinct from the two. But here we must ask: What else do we need to know about the Holy Spirit? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us that “[t]he Holy Spirit, whom Christ, the head, pours out on his members, builds, animates and sanctifies the Church.”⁴² Many things can be said of the Holy Spirit; for, inasmuch as He is God, He is beyond us and that we cannot explain Him fully with our limited human words. But here, I would just like to focus on one aspect that I deem important when talking about Him. In this paper, I would like to speak about the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Life.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Life on two accounts. First, as the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, He is the Spirit of God that breathes existence and life, giving birth to all things. Secondly, in many and different ways, He sustains and brings to fulfillment the redemptive work of Jesus, and makes possible for us a life of communion with God. Thus, in this topic concerning the Holy Spirit, we shall first see how this Spirit is indeed the source of existence and life. Then, we shall see how this same Spirit is also the source of man’s communion with God.

The Holy Spirit is the source of our life. He is the reason why every living human being is alive, and not dead. But where do we get this idea? We get this from the Scripture itself. Here, we owe a debt of gratitude to the Israelites of the Old Testament who became God’s instrument of His self-revelation. The Old Testament points to the reality of the Holy Spirit in different ways. In general, however, they spoke of the Holy

⁴² CCC, no. 747.

Spirit as the powerful presence of God.⁴³ And although they never really considered Him as a person, nevertheless, for us Christians, we believe that this spirit of God that is being talked about in the Old Testament is actually a prefiguration of the Holy Spirit whose identity Jesus would finally reveal in the New Testament.

Concerning the Holy Spirit as the one who is responsible for the existence of every living human being, we see a confirmation of this assertion in the creation of the first man in the book of Genesis when God breathed into him the breath of life which made him alive (cf. Gen 2:7). Here we see the Holy Spirit as the breath of God that gives life to man.⁴⁴ We also see the same assertion in the story of Noah when God speaks of His spirit as the source of man's life (cf. Gen 6:3). In the book of Job, this assertion is made clearer when it says, "If he should take back his spirit to himself, and gather to himself his breath, all flesh would perish together, and all mortals return to dust" (Job 34:14-15). Indeed, we are alive because of the Holy Spirit. Without Him we are dead. In this regard, St. Ambrose, himself, in his work *Of the Holy Spirit* spoke of Him as the one that gives life to creation.

But who can doubt that the Holy Spirit gives life to all things: since both He, as the Father and the Son, is the Creator of all things; and the Almighty Father is understood to have done nothing without the Holy Spirit; and since also in the beginning of the creation the Spirit moved upon the water. . . . no creature can stand without the Holy Spirit, . . . the Spirit is the Creator of the whole creation.⁴⁵

The Holy Spirit, however, is not only the source of life for man, or of any living thing for that matter. He is also the source of everything that exists, whether alive or non-living. His presence which hovered over the waters at the very beginning of creation testifies to His cooperation in the work of creation (cf. Gen 1:2). Psalm 33 affirms this reality when it says, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth" (Ps 33:6). Indeed, the Holy Spirit is the breath of God "who breathes fire into the equations and continues to breathe life into the exuberant diverse, interrelated community of living things."⁴⁶ "Things exist only because God's Breath dwells in all things and holds them in being."⁴⁷

But the Holy Spirit is not only the source of our existence and life. He is also the one that makes possible our life of communion with God by giving us the necessary graces that we need in order to live our lives according to the example shown by Christ. Aside from His involvement in creation and redemption, the Holy Spirit is responsible for our sanctification. This is the role that is appropriated to Him as the Third Person in the Trinity. After having reconciled us to the Father through Jesus, it is now the Holy Spirit's role to accompany us and guide us to the Father. It is His role to lead us to that life of

⁴³ Cf. Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life: A Theology of Creator Spirit* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 33.

⁴⁴ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, no. 22.

⁴⁵ Saint Ambrose, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Vol.10: Select Works and Letters of St. Ambrose*, eds. Philip Schaff, D.D., LL.D. and Henry Wace, D.D. (Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 118-119.

⁴⁶ Edwards, *Breath of Life*, 33.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

communion with Him. And so, at the Pentecost, the Apostles experienced the power of the Holy Spirit which strengthened and empowered them to preach the Good News of salvation that was commanded by Christ, and became His witnesses to the ends of the earth (cf. Acts 2).

Indeed, the Holy Spirit makes communion with God possible by strengthening us so that no matter how difficult the situation may be, we will always be ready to take up the task like the Apostles at the Pentecost. Blessed John Paul II in his encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem* speaks of the Holy Spirit in this regard:

The hidden breath of the divine Spirit enables the human spirit to open in its turn before the saving and sanctifying self-opening of God. Through the gift of grace, which comes from the Holy Spirit, man enters a new life, is brought into the supernatural reality of the divine life itself and becomes a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, a living temple of God. For through the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son come to him and take up their abode with him. In communion of grace with the Trinity, man's living area is broadened and raised up to the supernatural level of divine life.⁴⁸

Thus in this section on the Holy Spirit, we have explained that He is the Spirit of Life not only in the sense that He is the source of existence and life, but that He also makes a life of communion with God possible for us. It must however be noted that throughout the whole of Chapter 2, the term Spirit of Life should be understood in the second sense, namely, communion with God. We now proceed to the next section by saying that this Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Life, dwells in the Catholic Church. As a result, the Church, being the Temple of the Holy Spirit, can also be seen the Temple of Life.

The Church as the Temple of Life

The Church is “a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁹ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes her as “the People that God gathers in the whole world. She exists in local communities and is made real as a liturgical, above all a Eucharistic, assembly. She draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ's Body.”⁵⁰

Foreshadowed since the time of creation when God created man and woman to form the first community,⁵¹ the Church has been inaugurated by Jesus Christ. He did this by preaching the Good News of the coming of the Reign of God.⁵² In fact, the Church is understood as the “Reign of Christ already present in mystery.”⁵³ This Church which has been inaugurated by Christ is continually sanctified by the Holy Spirit, who was sent on

⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, no. 58.

⁴⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4.

⁵⁰ CCC, no. 752.

⁵¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 760.

⁵² Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, no. 3.

the Pentecost so that those who believe might have access to the Father.⁵⁴ If this is the case, then we can say that the Holy Spirit, revealed at Pentecost, is in the Church to continue Christ's mission.

The Church then is the Temple of the Holy Spirit inasmuch as the Holy Spirit dwells in her. She "contains" the Holy Spirit, not in a sense that she limits Him, but in a sense that she receives the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Being given the mission of establishing the Reign of God on earth, she is endowed with the gifts of her founder through the Spirit.⁵⁵ The *Catechism* explains that the Church "is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the soul, as it were, of the Mystical Body, the source of its life, of its unity in diversity, and of the riches of its gifts and charisms."⁵⁶ Therefore, the Church is rightly seen as the place where the Spirit flourishes.⁵⁷

Blessed John Paul II, in his encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*, speaks of the Church as "the sign and instrument of the presence and action of the life-giving Spirit."⁵⁸ But if the Church is the sign and instrument of the Holy Spirit who gives life, then the Church is an instrument that gives life. Being the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Church can therefore rightly be called the Temple of Life. It is a temple inasmuch as it is the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit, where He is worshipped with the Father and the Son. Here, it has to be clarified that the word "life," in this context, refers to communion with God. In short, the Church is an instrument through which the Holy Spirit gives graces to us so that we might strive to live a life of communion with God. Thus the Church's mission is essentially religious because it looks at man from the perspective of his ultimate end, which is communion with God in eternity.⁵⁹

The Church can be assured of this reality because she is ever connected, through the Holy Spirit, with Christ the "true vine" who gives life to the branches (cf. Jn 15:1-5). To a world that is plagued by confusion, chaos and suffering, she constantly brings inspiration and hope. She is a light in the midst of darkness. She sheds light in the night of our ignorance in order to show us the path of salvation.⁶⁰ Thus, the Church, in this world, will always be the sacrament of salvation, the sign and instrument of the communion of God and human beings.⁶¹ The Church is the Temple of Life because it is through her that salvation and communion with God is achieved. Through the Church, true life, which is promised by Christ (cf. Jn 14:6), is attained.

Looking, however, at the Church today we ask: How can we speak of the Church as the Temple of Life? How can we speak of the Church as the instrument of salvation or

⁵⁴ Cf. *Ibid*, no. 4.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Ibid*, no. 5.

⁵⁶ *CCC*, no. 809.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Ibid*, no. 749.

⁵⁸ John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, no. 64.

⁵⁹ Cf. James Walsh, ed., *The Mind of Paul VI: On the Church and the World*, trans. Archibald Colquhoun (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1964), 9.

⁶⁰ Cf. Bonaventure Kloppenburg, *The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Illinois: Franciscan Herald Press, 1974), 21.

⁶¹ Cf. *CCC*, no. 780.

communion when within her there are a lot of scandals going on? How do we explain such a problem? Here it must be remembered that while the Church, the dwelling-place of the Spirit, has indeed been founded by Christ, she, the Body of Christ, is also made up of people like us who are sinners – sinners who are striving to follow Jesus, our Head. We do not deny that there are mistakes or scandals in the Catholic Church. Indeed, we are aware that the Church is at once holy and in need of purification.⁶² That is why Pope Paul VI, in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, emphasized the Church’s need to be aware of her weaknesses in order to be able to carry out her mission to the world. He expresses the need for the Church to reflect on herself, to feel the throb of her own life and to know herself better if she wishes to live her proper vocation and offer to the world her message of brotherhood and salvation.⁶³ And yet the same pope reminds us not to be afraid because, the Church is being enlightened and guided by the Holy Spirit, who remains ready to fulfill without fail the promise of Christ.⁶⁴ For, Jesus Himself said: “the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send on my account, will in his turn make everything plain, and recall to your minds everything I have said to you” (Jn 14:26).

Here, it is also good to mention that, while in fact, the Church has produced a countless number of holy men and women, she is holy, in the first place, not because of the holiness of her members, but because Jesus Christ, her Head, is holy. He is the source of her holiness. The Church is the instrument of salvation because of the Spirit of Christ who dwells in the Church. And just as the Head is holy, so does the Body. This is the reason why the Church is holy despite the fact that her members are sinners.⁶⁵

Indeed, because the Church is made up of sinners, she needs constant reform. And yet according to Pope Benedict XVI, this reform, which is needed at all times, “does not consist in constantly remodelling ‘our’ Church according to our taste, or in inventing her ourselves, but in ceaselessly clearing away our subsidiary constructions to let in the pure light that comes from above and that is also the dawning of pure freedom.”⁶⁶ Fidelity to Christ then is the key to this reform. And the more we become open and faithful to Christ through the Spirit, the more the Church becomes “an event of grace as the lives of its members are transformed in hope, in joy, in self-forgetful love, in peace, in patience, and in all other Christlike virtues.”⁶⁷

The weaknesses of the members of the Church—our weaknesses and sinfulness—should not discourage us. Because, Jesus, our Head, has promised us the “light of life” (cf. Jn 8:12) as long as we follow Him. Thus we can be assured that, as long as we strive to remain faithful to Jesus, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we will be instruments of God’s salvation, and the Church as a whole will indeed become more visible as the Temple of Life, through which we gain the true life of communion with God.

⁶² Cf. Kloppenburg, *Ecclesiology of Vatican II*, 49.

⁶³ Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, no. 27.

⁶⁴ Cf. *Ibid*, no. 28.

⁶⁵ Cf. *CCC*, no. 823.

⁶⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1996), 140.

⁶⁷ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 70.

The Sacraments as Channels of Life

Initiation to Life

The sacraments are “channels of life” inasmuch as, through them, the Holy Spirit, in the Church, dispenses all the necessary graces that man needs in order to attain a life of communion with God. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* defines the sacraments as “efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us.”⁶⁸ It is, therefore, through these sacraments that man is elevated to that state where God wants him to be – a son/daughter of God.

There are seven sacraments inasmuch as there are different stages in our lives as Christians. “The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life: they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Christian’s life of faith. There is thus a certain resemblance between the stages of natural life and the stages of the spiritual life.”⁶⁹ They may be categorized into three groups: sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist), sacraments of healing (Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick) and sacraments of vocation (Holy Orders and Matrimony). Indeed, it is God’s will that the Church helps man attain his salvation through these individual sacraments.⁷⁰ Therefore, through these sacraments, man attains his ultimate goal, and responds to God’s ultimate calling, which is communion with Him in eternity.

The first of the three categories of the seven sacraments is the sacraments of initiation. They are Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. These sacraments are indispensable inasmuch as they lay the foundations of every Christian life. It is because through these sacraments, we receive in increasing measure graces from God that leads man towards Christian perfection.⁷¹

The first of the sacraments of initiation—and of all the seven sacraments—is the sacrament of Baptism. It is the foundational sacrament inasmuch as it is the basis of the whole Christian life and the door which opens and makes possible the reception of the other sacraments. Through Baptism, the person becomes an adopted son of God and receives “new life” in Christ through the sanctifying grace which enables communion with God. Hence, the sacrament of Baptism is necessary for one’s salvation for those who have heard the Gospel and have the chance of receiving the sacrament (cf. Mk 16:16). Jesus Himself affirms this reality when He tells Nicodemus that “no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit” (Jn 3:5). Thus, before He went up to the Father, He commissioned His disciples to proclaim and baptize all people (cf. Mt 28:19-20). Therefore, through the sanctifying grace which enables communion with God, this sacrament of Baptism gives new life to all who receive it.

As one grows in his life as a Christian, one is called to become an active member of the Church. One is called to spread this faith and defend it at all cost. The person needs strength from God in order to fulfill these obligations. And so we have the sacrament of

⁶⁸ CCC, no. 1131.

⁶⁹ Ibid., no. 1210.

⁷⁰ Cf. John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*, no. 63.

⁷¹ Cf. CCC, no. 1212.

Confirmation. This sacrament, which has been part of our tradition since the time of the Apostles (cf. Acts 8:14-17), through the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit, strengthens the “new life” that the person has received in Baptism, so that he may become a true witness to Christ, an active member of the Church. And so, by this sacrament, the baptized “are more perfectly bound to the Church and are enriched with a special strength of the Holy Spirit. Hence they are, as true witnesses of Christ, more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.”⁷² As for the efficaciousness of this sacrament, we can only look at the experience of the Apostles at Pentecost when—from people who were chained to their fears—they became bold preachers and witnesses of the Gospel of Christ (cf. Acts 2).

This “new life” that was received in Baptism and was strengthened by Confirmation needs to be sustained, nourished and brought to maturity through the sacrament of the Eucharist. The sacrament of the Eucharist, which is the living memorial of Christ’s Paschal Mystery—His redemptive act—is the source and summit of the Christian life⁷³ inasmuch as it is the “culmination both of God’s action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁴ Through the Eucharist, Christ offers life, by the Holy Spirit, to men,⁷⁵ so that they may offer their lives to God. Indeed, it is the Eucharist that sustains, nourishes and brings to maturity the “new life” that we have received from God in Baptism, because through this sacrament we receive the living bread that gives eternal life (cf. Jn 6:51-56), “the medicine of immortality, the antidote for death and the food that makes us live forever in Jesus Christ.”⁷⁶ For in fact, through the Eucharist we already participate by anticipation in the heavenly liturgy, where we hope to live in communion with God in eternity.⁷⁷

Restoration and Promotion of Life

The other two categories of the seven sacraments are the sacraments of healing and service. The sacraments of healing are Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick. The sacraments of service are Holy Orders and Matrimony. We shall deal with these sacraments in this order: sacraments of healing (Reconciliation and Anointing of the Sick) and sacraments of service (Holy Orders and Matrimony).

The sacraments of healing restore the healthy spiritual life of a Christian—which is communion with God—by bestowing upon him the graces of forgiveness in Reconciliation and strength in the Anointing of the Sick. It is in this sense that we speak of them as sacraments that restore life to a Christian.

⁷² Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, no. 11.

⁷⁴ Congregation of Rites, *Eucharisticum Mysterium*, no. 6 as quoted from *CCC*, no. 1325.

⁷⁵ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, no. 1.

⁷⁶ *CCC*, no. 1405.

⁷⁷ Cf. *CCC*, no. 1326.

We have just explained that the sacrament of Reconciliation restores life inasmuch as it bestows upon the penitent forgiveness through which he is freed from his sins. The *Catechism* teaches that upon reception of the sacrament, the penitent experiences peace and serenity of conscience and increase in spiritual strength.⁷⁸ But why do we need this sacrament in the first place? We need this sacrament because, wounded as we are due to our first parents' disobedience, we are prone to commit sin.⁷⁹ And so Christ instituted this sacrament by giving to His disciples the power to forgive sins after His resurrection (cf. Jn 20:19-23), knowing that the new life received from the sacraments of initiation can be weakened and lost due to sin.⁸⁰ We believe that a person who is in the state of mortal sin, while physically alive, is spiritually dead inasmuch as he is cut off from his relationship with God. Hence, this sacrament which restores communion with God through forgiveness is a sacrament that restores life. It is in this sense that Reconciliation is necessary for the salvation of man. And just like the prodigal son, a person who is dead because of sin, and receives this sacrament, comes back to life (cf. Lk 15:30).

The other sacrament of healing is the Anointing of the Sick. How does this sacrament restore life to the person? As explained previously, this sacrament restores life by giving strength, among other effects, to the sick person. The letter of James gives an indication that this practice has been going on since the time of the early Christians (cf. Jas 5:14-15). Vatican Council II explains that “[b]y the sacred anointing of the sick and the prayer of the priests the whole Church commends those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord that he may raise them up and save them.”⁸¹ Pope Paul VI speaks of this reality as that which takes away sins and strengthens the soul of the sick person, and sometimes regains bodily health.⁸² In a similar manner, Karl Rahner refers to this restoration as salvation either as the recovery of one's health or the strengthening of oneself.⁸³ The *Catechism* enumerates the following effects of this sacrament: strength, peace, courage, forgiveness of sins and restoration of health.⁸⁴ We can therefore say that this sacrament restores life inasmuch as it strengthens the soul in times of grave illness so that the sick person may not lose hope in God.

We now go to the sacraments of service: Holy Orders and Matrimony. These two sacraments promote life inasmuch as they are “directed towards the salvation of others; if they contribute as well to personal salvation, it is through service to others that they do so. They confer a particular mission in the Church and serve to build up the People of God.”⁸⁵

The sacrament of Holy Orders, which is a participation in the priesthood of Christ (cf. Heb 5:10), promotes life by nourishing “the Church with the word and grace of God

⁷⁸ Cf. CCC, no. 1496.

⁷⁹ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, no. 2.

⁸⁰ Cf. CCC, nos. 1420-1421, 1426.

⁸¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

⁸² Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick*, no. 5.

⁸³ Cf. Karl Rahner, *The Anointing of the Sick* (New Jersey: Dimension Books, 1970), 34.

⁸⁴ Cf. CCC, no. 1532.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 1534.

in the name of Christ.”⁸⁶ In the words of Blessed John Paul II, this sacrament is “for the salvation of truth, for the love and holiness of the entire people of God, for the spiritual unity of the Church.”⁸⁷ Open to the light of God in Christ, it is the task of those who are conferred with this sacrament to help the whole community conform to the image of God.⁸⁸ The Vatican II document *Presbyterorum Ordinis* speaks of priests striving to procure the glory of God which consists in men’s acceptance of God’s plan and their manifestation in it in their whole life.⁸⁹ Thus, in order to accomplish this great task of leading others to God, the sacrament of Holy Orders “configures the recipient to Christ by a special grace of the Holy Spirit, so that he may serve as Christ’s instrument for His Church. By ordination one is enabled to act as a representative of Christ, Head of the Church, in His triple office of priest, prophet and king.”⁹⁰ Faithful to the mission entrusted by Christ to the Apostles, the sacrament of Holy Orders therefore promotes life of communion with God by leading, teaching and uniting the members of the Church to Christ, especially through the sacramental ministry.

As for Matrimony, this sacrament promotes life in a unique way, not only through procreation, but also through the loving relationship between spouses, and the love and education of children to the faith, which brings the whole family closer to God. Christian married couples “help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in the rearing of their children.”⁹¹ In so doing, they do not only bring the whole family to God; they influence the whole society as well. What is crucial here, however, is the love that the spouses have for each other. In his book *Love and Responsibility*, Blessed John Paul II speaks of married life as “the continual ripening of the relationship between two people, in all the areas of activity which conjugal life includes.”⁹² The love that we are talking about here is not a mere feeling, but a love that is modeled on the self-sacrificing love of Christ for His Church (cf. Eph 5:25). This is what it means to be united in one flesh (cf. Mt 19:6); to be joined together by the inseparable bond of true and selfless love. It is a heavy responsibility indeed. Therefore, those who enter this particular state of life are fortified and consecrated through the same sacrament, so that they may be able to fulfill their conjugal and family role. Through the sacrament of Matrimony “spouses are penetrated with the spirit of Christ and their whole life is suffused by faith, hope, and charity; thus they increasingly further their own perfection and their mutual sanctification, and together they render glory to God.”⁹³ In other words, it “enables Christian husbands and wives to love one another with a redemptive, sanctifying love, for

⁸⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11.

⁸⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Novo Incipiente Nostro*, no. 5.

⁸⁸ Cf. International Theological Commission, *Volume 1, Texts and Documents 1969-1985* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 54.

⁸⁹ Cf. Vatican Council II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 2.

⁹⁰ *CCC*, no. 1581.

⁹¹ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 11.

⁹² Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 30.

⁹³ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 48.

their human conjugal love has been graced by Christ Himself and merges the divine with the human.”⁹⁴

Thus, the sacraments of healing restore life through the grace of forgiveness in Reconciliation and strength in the Anointing of the Sick. The sacraments of service promote life by leading, teaching and uniting the members of the Church to Christ through Holy Orders, and by the love between spouses and education of children through Matrimony.

Summary

To summarize what we have said in this chapter, we spoke of God as the “sustainer of life” inasmuch as through the Holy Spirit’s work of sanctification, Jesus Christ, the Head, continues His work of redemption for man in the Church, especially by means of the seven sacraments – a work that finds its completion in man’s life of communion with God in eternity. Indeed, God gives man the graces he needs so that notwithstanding his weakened condition due to sin, he may still be able to respond positively to the invitation of God to the fullness of life – a concept that we shall deal with in the next chapter.

⁹⁴ William May, *Marriage: The Rock on Which the Family Is Built*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995), 18.

CHAPTER 3

GOD, THE FULLNESS OF LIFE

“For he will repay according to each one's deeds: to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.”

– Romans 2:6-7

God is the “fullness of life” inasmuch as man can only attain the happiness that he truly seeks in a life of communion with Him. In this chapter, we shall see how God continues to invite man to the fullness of life through his unquenchable desire for happiness. Man responds to this invitation through love. And, while this fullness of life reaches completion in heaven, it starts here on earth. Lastly, we find in Mary the model and the assurance of the fullness of life.

The Fullness of Life as God's Invitation to Man

Man's Desire for God in His Desire for Happiness

Man is a complex being. He is not only composed of matter like the rest of God's creatures. He also has an immortal soul that makes him free, and has the capacity for self-determination. Different from the rest of creation, man is capable of deciding and forging his own destiny. Throughout history, man continues to advance, explore and conquer every uncharted territory that stimulates his curiosity. Each person, in various ways and degrees, longs for something in life. And yet every bit of man's choice and activity since his earliest existence on this planet, no matter how varied and, at times, conflicting they are, is driven by a single desire – the desire to be happy. Man seeks happiness; and he does everything in view of fulfilling this goal.

Why does man want to be happy? Man has this natural desire for happiness because deep within himself, whether consciously or unconsciously, he craves a life that is full, autonomous, and worthy of his nature as human being. He feels that he is destined for a higher form of life.⁹⁵ Yet no matter how hard he tries, man never fully satisfies his inner desire. No matter how secure he is, no matter how comfortable he is, no matter how happy he is man still longs for more from life. We learn this from our history. We know this by looking at our situation today. We do not only want to avoid anything that brings about pain, problem or sadness. Far more than that, we all want to experience life to the highest degree possible. We all thirst for the fullness of life.

The story of the rich young man in the Gospel of Matthew captures this aspect of reality that is in man – this unquenchable desire for life. The young man is rich and righteous. He has many possessions, and he follows the commandments. And yet in spite of his supposedly blessed situation, the young man is not satisfied. He feels that something is lacking. He knows he is seeking for something more than just material abundance or righteous living. He seeks that which every human being constantly desires

⁹⁵ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, nos. 9-10.

– eternal life. The rich young man seeks a life that is neither bound by space nor time. He seeks a life without limits (cf. Mt 19:16-22).

How do we satisfy this unquenchable thirst for happiness? How do we attain the fullness of life? Before answering this question, a more basic question should first be addressed: What is this unquenchable desire for happiness? What is it that we really want? Asking this question usually leads us to varied answers just as there are different people in the world. And yet amidst all the answers we still ask: What is the real answer? We believe that this desire for happiness refers to man's desire for God. Man desires happiness because deep within himself he desires to be with God.

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name. My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips when I think of you on my bed, and meditate on you in the watches of the night; for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy. My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me. (Ps 63:1-8)

Now that we know that this happiness that we are constantly seeking is actually our desire to be with God, we ask another question: Why do we seek God? Of all the things in this life, why does it have to be Him? I would like to answer this question by quoting the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for.”⁹⁶ In other words, we desire to be with God because we are made for Him. We are made to seek Him and to be with Him. And it is through our unquenchable desire for happiness that God continually calls us back to Himself. God wants to share Himself to man. And man will only attain complete happiness in God.

The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God. The invitation to converse with God is addressed to man as soon as he comes into being. For if man exists it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his creator.⁹⁷

Going back to the story of the rich young man, we now see the utmost importance of Jesus' response to the most universal question posed by the young person: “Come, follow me” (Mt 19:21). For if Jesus is the “image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), then discipleship must be the key to eternal life. Why is it so? It is because anyone who follows and is in communion with Jesus, who is one with the Father (cf. Jn 10:30), is also in communion with the Father. Moreover, Jesus, Himself, said that no one comes through the Father except through Him (cf. Jn 14:6).

⁹⁶ CCC, no. 27.

⁹⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 19.

Indeed, each person is called by God to a life of complete happiness. Each person is called to the fullness of life. And yet this happiness, this fullness of life, can never be attained apart from God. The key to the fullness of life is to live a life of communion with God. For as St. Augustine beautifully put it in his famous prayer:

Great are you, O Lord, and exceedingly worthy of praise, your power is immense, and your wisdom beyond reckoning. And so we humans, who are a due part of your creation, long to praise you—we who carry our mortality about with us, carry the evidence of our sin and with it the proof that you thwart the proud. Yet these humans, due part of your creation as they are, still do long to praise you. You arouse us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you.⁹⁸

Love as Man's Way to a Life of Communion with God

In the previous section, we said that no matter how varied man's ambition in life may be, he is driven only by one desire – the desire to be happy. While this desire has led man to great inventions and new discoveries, it has also led him to succumb not only to empty promises but also to moments of failure and utter destruction. Many times it has led to the destruction of values and people. People who are supposedly driven by lofty ideals are not exempted from this. Furthermore, this failure has reached even those who believe in God or in Jesus. In the history of the Church, there have been people who do inhuman things in the name of God. Indeed, man's search for happiness has led him to different places, sometimes to places that only bring him utter sadness.

This leads us to the question that was asked in the previous section: How must we attain happiness? How must we attain the fullness of life? For us believers, we ask this question: How must we attain communion with God? Jesus' response to the young man who sought eternal life is discipleship (cf. Mt 19:16-21). In the previous section, we have already demonstrated how this discipleship leads to communion with God, and therefore the fullness of life. We said that to follow Jesus—which is to be in communion with Him—is also to be in communion with the Father who is one with Jesus (cf. John 10:30). In fact, He also said that no one reaches the Father except through Him (cf. Jn 14:6). Thus it is only in following Jesus that the fullness of life is attained.

Now we might ask: What does it take to follow Jesus? What does it mean to become His disciple? The answer to this question is found in the Gospel of John where Jesus says, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). From this we can say that discipleship means to love. One is a disciple of Jesus if one loves. For, to be able to follow Jesus, one must learn to love. But if discipleship is attained through love and discipleship is the key to communion with God, then love must be the key to communion with God or the fullness of life. To be happy then, one must learn to love. Love then is the way to man's happiness, to communion with God, to the fullness of life.

⁹⁸ Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding, O.S.B. (New York: Vintage Spiritual Classics, 1998), 3.

Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.⁹⁹

No wonder why Jesus “commands” His disciples to love (cf. Jn 15:9, 12). He says, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12). It is a requirement to a life of discipleship. It is a requirement to a life of communion with God. Anyone who does not love cannot become a disciple of Jesus. “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). Jesus explains that this commandment of love is for God and for neighbor (cf. Mt 22:36-40). All the other commandments fall under these two. And so if man wants to be in communion with God, man must learn to love God and neighbor. Karl Rahner has a good explanation regarding the relationship between love of God and neighbor:

The relationship of the love of God to a love of neighbor is not merely in virtue of the fact that a love of neighbor is commanded by it and functions somehow as a practical test case for it. . . Love of God and neighbor stand in a relationship of mutual conditioning. . . There is no love for God that is not, in itself, already a love for neighbor; and love for God only comes to its own identity through its fulfillment in a love for neighbor. Only one who loves his or her neighbor can know who God actually is. And only one who ultimately loves God can manage unconditionally to abandon himself or herself to another person, and not make that person the means of his or her own self-assertion.¹⁰⁰

This relationship between the two is supported in the Scripture when it says: “Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen” (1 Jn 4:20). The connection of these two loves is also asserted by Benedict XVI in commenting on the passage in his first encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*:

The unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbor is emphasized. One is so closely connected to the other that to say that we love God becomes a lie if we are closed to our neighbor or hate him altogether.¹⁰¹

One who loves the Creator must necessarily love His creation which flows from the Creator. On the other hand, one who loves creation cannot but love the Creator who is its source. It is not a love that is merely commanded by the first love, which is love of God, or vice versa. It is a love that naturally flows to the other. It is free for such is true love. From another point of view, the two loves cannot be separated. And the reason is that the person who is capable of truly or unconditionally loving God cannot but also love his neighbor in an unconditional way. On the other hand, the person who is capable of truly and unconditionally loving his neighbor cannot but also love God in an unconditional way. A person who is truly loving cannot but be truly loving. Thus the

⁹⁹ John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 10.

¹⁰⁰ Karl Rahner, *The Love of Jesus and the Love of Neighbor*, trans. Robert Barr (England: St Paul Publications, 1983), 71.

¹⁰¹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, no. 16.

connection between the two loves stems both from the point of view of the one being loved and from the point of view of the one who loves.

What is the extent of this love? Our love must extend to everyone. In the story of the Good Samaritan, Jesus points out that anyone is anybody's neighbor (cf. Lk 10:25-37). We are called to love everyone. Every person is a neighbor in the context of Jesus' commandments. That is why a true follower of Christ cannot remain within the confines of his home. His concern should be that of the whole human race. Jesus Himself commands His disciples to go to the ends of the earth (cf. Mt 28:19). "For by his innermost nature man is a social being; and if he does not enter into relations with others he can neither live nor develop his gifts."¹⁰² *Gaudium et Spes* points out that indeed there is a certain likeness between the union existing among the Divine Persons and the union of the sons of God in truth and love.¹⁰³ And so while it is true that we are called to start with what we have and where we are, nonetheless, we must not remain stagnant in our own little world. We are called to go forth and bring the love of Christ to others. For indeed, it is in the act of opening and giving ourselves that we attain the fullness of life (cf. Mt 10:39).

The Fullness of Life as a Human Experience

Communion with God in Heaven

Previously, we talked about love as the way to attain the fullness of life. But if indeed this were true, why do people who follow this path of love continue to suffer? Put simply: Why do good people suffer? In our experiences, we see people who, despite the fact that they are close to God, continue to suffer. It is our experience that despite the advancement in science and technology today, so many people are still afflicted by diseases, corruption, conflicts, wars, natural calamities, etc. In fact, at times, it feels like things are getting worse, at least from what we experience. For it seems that any solution to a problem leads to another problem. Even in our lives we continue to suffer both physically and emotionally despite the fact that we strive to love God and others. At times, the very act of striving to love God causes us pain, especially when we continually fail and offend him. We suffer because of our own limitations. Regarding this point, we can go on and on just to prove that people are suffering. It will be endless. The point is this: In this life no matter how much we love, we continue to suffer. So the question is: If God has indeed promised the fullness of life to those who love Him, why do we, who strive to love God, continue to suffer?

It seems ironic that even Jesus, Himself, the one who promised us eternal life (cf. Jn 5:24), suffered greatly in this life to the point of death. What does this mean? Is the promise of eternal life nothing but a lie? We have to know that Jesus did not promise us a life free from suffering in this life (cf. Jn 15:20). He promised us complete happiness in the life that is to come (cf. Mt 5:12). He, Himself, is a testament to this inasmuch as He resurrected after His death on the cross. Indeed, we are promised that the fullness of life

¹⁰² *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 12.

¹⁰³ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 24.

that we are seeking will find its completion in heaven, our ultimate end and destination, “where” all those who are there will be in “communion of life and love” with God, which brings about the “fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definite happiness.”¹⁰⁴ “The Beatitudes teach us the final end to which God calls us: the Kingdom, the vision of God, participation in the divine nature, eternal life, filiation, rest in God.”¹⁰⁵ “While the mind is at a loss before the mystery of death, the Church, taught by divine Revelation, declares that God has created man in view of a blessed destiny that lies beyond the limits of his sad state on earth.”¹⁰⁶ This will be fulfilled in eternity. No wonder why even Jesus, Himself, was not exempted, and in fact underwent immense agony in this life. In fact, His suffering was such that if we compare ourselves most of our sufferings would be nothing compared to His. Thus the fullness of life that we are seeking—in its completion—will only be experienced in heaven. It follows then that as long as we are in this life, there will always be pain and suffering inasmuch as we have the stain of original sin in each one of us.

The search for happiness is as old as our existence – so does the search for the fullness of life. In the Old Testament, this search which came in the concept of a promised reward began in the history of Israel with the promise of God to Abraham: “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:1-3). It was the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey – a land of abundance. The Promised Land was the immediate goal of the nomadic tribes and was the way to a secure future. When the Israelites got the land, it was divided and they settled down to an agrarian way of life. Later, however, with the establishment of the monarchy, a new promise was made in the Davidic Covenant. In the book of Samuel, God made a promise to David saying: “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16). It was then believed that from the House of David a Messiah-King will come to rule over Israel. Throughout this period Israel lived by the promise of a long life and happiness in this world as a reward for a just life.¹⁰⁷

Later on, during the time of the exile and further persecutions under other empires, they came up with this transcendental vision of a world beyond history. The promise that was made to Ezekiel speaks of a kind of “resurrection” in which all Israel will rise from the grave (cf. Ez 37). Daniel’s book (cf. Dan 7-12) looks forward to a time when the world empire will be overcome and the 5th empire will be established under the Son of Man, who is a heavenly being who will not be revealed until the end. On that day, the dead will rise and those whose names are written in the book of life will rise to eternal life; the wicked will rise to eternal punishment.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ CCC, no. 1023-1024.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., no. 1726.

¹⁰⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 18.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Colm McKeating, *Peace at the Last: A Christian Theology of the Last Things* (Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2009), 45-46.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Ibid., 50-51.

The topic of eternal life pervades the New Testament writings. We see in Matthew this saying of Jesus: “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life” (Mt 19:29). In a parallel passage in Luke, there is the distinction between the present and the future age: “And he said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life’” (Lk 18:29-30).

Since we encounter this concept in many of the New Testament writings, we ask: What is eternal life? In the Gospel of John, Jesus says: “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Eternal life then is about knowing who God is. But what does knowledge mean in this context? Knowledge in the biblical sense is not merely a conclusion of an intellectual process, but the fruit of an experience, a personal contact; when it matures, it is love (cf. John 10:14g NJB). Thus eternal life then is a loving encounter with God. Inasmuch as this loving encounter begins now, eternal life then begins in the now. However, this loving encounter with God finds its completion or fulfillment in heaven.

The *Catechism* teaches of the promise to eternal life: “Those who die in God’s grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live forever with Christ. They are like God forever, for they ‘see him as he is,’ face to face.”¹⁰⁹ Heaven is where we shall experience the fullness of life in its perfection. What is this experience of heaven? How can we describe such thing? It is difficult to describe something that we have not experienced yet, especially since it is something that goes beyond our experience here on earth. So the best we can do is to explain it using the experiences and language that we have as an analogy no matter how imperfect it may be.

One image of heaven is that of a Great Banquet or a Wedding Feast where “the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear” (Is 25:6). Another image of heaven is that of a New Jerusalem that gleams with the splendor of God (cf. Rev 21:9-27). Still another image is that of The Heavenly City prepared by God for His people where He is not ashamed to be called their God (cf. Heb 11:15-16).

Another famous description of our experience in heaven is that of the Beatific Vision. In the Constitution *Benedictus Deus*, Benedict XII describes the experience of the saints in heaven as seeing “the divine essence with an intuitive vision and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature by way of object of vision; rather the divine essence immediately manifests itself to them, plainly, clearly and openly, and in this vision they enjoy the divine essence.”¹¹⁰

Benedict XVI speaks of heaven as an experience of communion with God where “God totally permeates the whole of man with his plenitude and his utter openness. God

¹⁰⁹ CCC, no. 1023.

¹¹⁰ Pope Benedict XII, *Benedictus Deus* as quoted from *ND*, no. 2305.

is ‘all in all,’ and thus the human person enters upon his boundless fulfillment.”¹¹¹ He adds that this communion is not only with God but also with others: “If heaven depends on being in Christ, then it must involve a co-being with all those who, together, constitute the body of Christ. . . . It is the open society of the communion of saints, and in this way the fulfillment of all human communion.”¹¹² This however does not reduce the individuality of the person but brings it to perfection: “The integration of the ‘I’ into the body of Christ . . . is not the self’s dissolution but a purification which is, at one and the same time, the actualization of its highest potential. This is why heaven is individual for each and every one. Everyone sees God in his own proper way. Everyone receives the love offered by the totality in the manner suggested by his own irreplaceable uniqueness.”¹¹³

In the end, whether we speak of a Great Banquet, Wedding Feast, New Jerusalem, Heavenly City, Beatific Vision, this fullness of life that we are talking about, is simply beyond our understanding and words. One thing we can be sure of is that in heaven, there is the fullness of life, the fullness of happiness because of the fact that we experience total communion with God. This happiness that one experiences in heaven is so immense and beyond what our eyes have seen or ears have heard or our mind can ever conceive (cf. 1 Cor. 2:9). For in heaven “they will see his face. . . . And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:4-5).

Communion with God on Earth

The life of communion with God that we seek, although it finds its completion in heaven, has its beginning here on earth. The fullness of life begins on earth. Happiness is experienced even now. We know that in spite of the imperfections of life, we still experience happiness and contentment. We experience a little heaven here on earth. Whenever we live a life of love for God and for others, whether consciously or unconsciously, we experience a taste of happiness. The future that lies ahead then is connected to the present not only because what we do in the present affects the future, but also because the future is already in the present. Indeed, even in the present we already receive the “first installment” (2 Cor 1:22) of God’s great gift that will find its completion in the future.

Happiness here on earth happens because of two things: hope and joy. Hope, for our purpose, is the expectation of a future good. This expectation brings about happiness. Joy, for our purpose, is the possession of a good. This possession brings about happiness itself.

We Christians are happy because we hope. We experience this in our daily lives. When we are expecting something that is so good, we feel happy. The message of Jesus

¹¹¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, trans. Michael Waldstein, (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 235.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

is a message of hope. The Beatitudes which is at the center of Jesus' preaching¹¹⁴ gives hope to those who want to follow Him through the reward that one will receive. The six Beatitudes in the Gospel according to Matthew speak of this hope of receiving the reward in the future (cf. Mt 5:4-9).¹¹⁵ In this regard St. Paul remains happy, and even boasts, in the midst of trials because of the "hope of sharing the glory of God" (Rm 5:2).

However, the Beatitudes do not only speak of the future. The first and the eighth Beatitude speak of a present reward (cf. Mt 5:3, 10).¹¹⁶ Anyone who follows Jesus already possesses the Kingdom of heaven, which means the Kingdom of God.¹¹⁷ What then is this Kingdom of God all about? For St. Paul, "the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). Thus the Christian is happy in this life because of the possession of the Kingdom. The reign of God in each one makes one happy in spite of everything. We experience this whenever we do something good. The mere act of giving or loving gives us pleasure, even humanly speaking. It is because God who is love (cf. 1 John 4:8) is in everything that involves love. Thus anyone who follows Jesus through love, and therefore is in communion with God, possesses happiness not only because of the mere expectation of something good, but also because of the possession of something good.

Pope Paul VI speaks of this happiness when he speaks of joy in his apostolic exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*:

This joy of living in God's love begins here below. It is the joy of the Kingdom of God. . . it is the joy of the new presence of the Risen Christ dispensing to his own the Holy Spirit, so that he may dwell in them. . . It consists in the human spirit's finding repose and a deep satisfaction in the possession of the Triune God. . . But the disciples' sadness . . . will be promptly changed into a spiritual joy that no one will be able to take away from them.¹¹⁸

We see this in the lives of the saints. They are a proof and our examples of happiness. It is what kept Mother Teresa to continue her work for the poorest of the poor. It is what sustained Blessed John Paul II in his arduous tasks that transcend mere human abilities. It is what gave our founder St. John Bosco the joy and optimism despite the insurmountable concerns. Or St. Francis of Assisi who "in the most extreme abnegation, half blind, he was able to chant the unforgettable Canticle of the Creatures, the praise of our brother the sun, of all nature, which had become transparent for him like a pure

¹¹⁴ Cf. CCC, no. 1716.

¹¹⁵ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Mt 5:4-9).

¹¹⁶ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:10). "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:10).

¹¹⁷ Cf. Daniel Harrington, *Sacra Pagina: The Gospel of Matthew* (Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2007), 79.

¹¹⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Gaudete in Domino*, 12-14.

mirror of God's glory."¹¹⁹ Benedict XVI, talking about heaven, says that the experience of it is

not, for the Christian, some music of the future. Rather is it sheer description of what happens in the encounter with Christ, itself already present in its fundamental elements. To raise the question of "heaven" is thus not to float free from earth in a balloon of enthusiastic fantasy. It is to come to know more deeply that hidden presence by whose gift we truly live, even though we ourselves continually permit it to be camouflaged, and to withdraw from us, displaced by the many objects that occupy the foreground of our lives.¹²⁰

Happiness begins now. The fullness of life is experienced in the present. This is experienced by those who choose to follow the Lord Jesus' way of life – the way of love. Anyone who loves is in one way or another in communion with God who is love. We are happy because of the hope of future glory. But we are also happy because even now, we are achieving our salvation—communion with God—through the Spirit of Christ who dwells in us and makes communion with God possible (1 Pt 1:8-9). Indeed, anyone who loves truly lives the fullness of life.

Mary, Our Model and Assurance of the Fullness of Life

In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI stresses the importance of models: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses."¹²¹ I believe this does not only apply to a particular era but to all human beings in all places and at all times. By nature, it seems we are more convinced by actions and results than mere words or teaching. St. Francis of Assisi used to say: "Preach the gospel at all times; if necessary, use words." As Christians, we are often more inspired to follow Christ's radical teachings by people who preach with their actions more than their words. In this regard, we are so blessed to have so many outstanding examples in the Church through our saints. And yet, one that stands out among the rest is the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. *Lumen Gentium* teaches that Mary is the "outstanding model in faith and charity."¹²² In Mary we find both the perfect example of a person who has experienced the fullness of life on earth, and the perfect assurance of the fullness of life in heaven. In Mary, we understand what it means to love God with undivided heart.

Mary plays a special role in the history of salvation. She plays a special role in our lives. We are grateful to Mary, because, being the Mother of God, she brought Christ into the world, the one who has given us salvation by reconciling us to God. By accepting her role as the Mother of God, she participated in God's intervention that brought about our salvation. Because of this we also honor her as the Mother of God. Inasmuch as she is closer to her Son than any other human being, we also ask for her assistance and help because we believe that, being our mother in Christ, she cares for us in a very real way

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹²⁰ Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 234.

¹²¹ Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 41.

¹²² *Lumen Gentium*, no. 53.

especially since Jesus has entrusted us to her, and made her the mother of the disciples (cf. Jn 19:27).

And yet Mary is also our model because, even in her earthly life, being “full of grace”, she lived the fullness of life more than any other human being. She alone is full of grace. And being full of grace, she alone is totally free from sin. How does this “fullness of grace” become related to the fullness of life? As what Benedict XVI explains, this “fullness of grace” in Mary means that she is full of the Holy Spirit and that her life is intimately connected to God.

“Full of grace” therefore means . . . that Mary is a wholly open human being, one who has opened herself entirely, one who has placed herself in God’s hands boldly, limitlessly, and without fear for her own fate. It means that she lives wholly by and in relation to God. She is a listener and a prayer, whose mind and soul are alive to the manifold ways in which the living God quietly calls to her. She is one who prays and stretches forth to meet God; she is therefore a lover who has the breadth and magnanimity of true love, but who has also its unerring powers of discernment and its readiness to suffer.¹²³

The result of this “fullness of grace”—this openness to God—is Mary’s joyful disposition which is clearly seen in her *Magnificat*, which according to the same author, in a different book, “mirrors the entire soul, the entire personality of Mary.”¹²⁴ She rejoices truly because she rejoices in the Lord (cf. Luke 1:47). Mary is “full of grace.” She is happy because she is totally united to God. And because anyone who is “full of God” is also full of love inasmuch as God is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:16), then Mary is full of love. In this sense, Mary becomes the perfect example for us. Because, since she is full of love, without any stain of selfishness or sin, she is by far the best example of any human being who has lived the fullness of life.

The first “proof” of Mary’s total love for God is her virginity. We believe that Mary lived her whole life as a virgin.¹²⁵ This means that Mary preserved her physical integrity before, during and after giving birth to Jesus Christ.¹²⁶ She conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and she never had sexual relations with a man in her whole life, even when she was with Joseph. This she did because she consecrated her whole life to God. Everything that she has is made for God alone. This is the symbol of her total self-giving to God.¹²⁷ She wished to offer her whole self totally to God.

It is because of this virginity that she was able to say “yes” to God’s call for her to become the Mother of God. “It can be said that this consent to motherhood is above all a result of her total self-giving to God in virginity. Mary accepted her election as Mother of the Son of God, guided by spousal love, the love which totally ‘consecrates’ a human

¹²³ Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Mary: The Church at the Source*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 68.

¹²⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, *Maria: On the Mother of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009), 25.

¹²⁵ Cf. CCC, no. 499.

¹²⁶ Charles Belmonte, ed., *Faith Seeking Understanding: A Complete Course in Theology, Vol. 1* (Philippines: Studium Theologiae Foundation, 2006), 324.

¹²⁷ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 39.

being to God.”¹²⁸ The acceptance is not only an acceptance of the joy of being a mother, but also of suffering. If she is discovered to be pregnant despite being engaged to Joseph, she will end up being stoned to death.¹²⁹ Such was the faith and love of Mary for God that she was willing to sacrifice everything to do His will – to open herself completely to God. This motherhood goes on to believing even the things she did not understand about Jesus.

By accepting Jesus into herself in the Annunciation (cf. Luke 1:38), she became the first disciple of Jesus. And she continued to follow Him despite the fact that she did not understand everything about Jesus. She followed Him until the end when Jesus died on the cross (cf. John 19:25-27). Such was the love of Mary for God. It was a love that made her totally available to Him; a love that accepted even her possible death. It is a love that endured through the clouds of understanding – a love that endured suffering until the end. Such was the love of Mary. Such is the love of Mary who is “full of grace.” Indeed only one who has the fullness of God in her is ready to love Him with her whole self without any reservation.

Through these things we can say that Mary has lived the fullness of life on earth because she has loved with a pure and unconditional love for God. Mary is full of grace because she is full of God, full of life, full of love!

Mary, however, did not only show us what it takes to achieve the fullness of life. She herself showed us the reality of this fullness of life through her Assumption. The fullness of life that Mary lived here on earth ended with her Assumption.

Finally the Immaculate Virgin preserved free from all stain of original sin, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, when her earthly life was over, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, that she might be the more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords, and conqueror of sin and death.¹³⁰

Mary’s Assumption to heaven “sets before the eyes of the Church and of all mankind the image and the consoling proof of the fulfillment of their final hope, namely that this glorification is the destiny of all those whom Christ has made his brothers.”¹³¹ We are called to follow Christ in a way that Mary did. She gave her whole self to God. This is the key to happiness. This is the key to the fullness of life.

We might not have the “fullness of grace” that Mary had. But we are called to live a life of total love for God (cf. Mt. 22:37) like Mary who followed Jesus until Calvary. For it is only in this way that we will find the fullness of life “that the Lord has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12).

¹²⁸ Ibid., no. 39.

¹²⁹ Cf. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 34.

¹³⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 59.

¹³¹ Pope Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, no. 6.

Summary

Finally, in this chapter, we have explained that the fullness of life that man continually seeks is communion with God. However, we said that this communion with God is attained only through a life of love for God and others. Those who choose the path of love will ultimately experience the completion of this fullness of life in heaven, which already begins here on earth. Lastly, we find the model and the assurance of this fullness of life in the Blessed Virgin Mary who has lived a life of total dedication to God and is now closely united, in a special way, with her Son in heaven.

CONCLUSION

Our life as human beings is much more than just being alive in the biological sense. For us life means achieving the fullness of life. It means experiencing true happiness and fulfillment, and the sense of living according to the purpose of one's existence. And yet we know that this kind of life that we are talking about can only be achieved fully when we live a life of communion with God and others.

All of us, inasmuch as it is engraved in our human nature, have this constant desire to achieve this fullness of life. We strive for it in all that we do. And yet many times, we end up in wrong places or situations. We make wrong decisions and lose our way from the true path that leads us to the fullness of life. And the reason for this is that, oftentimes, we do not have a clear understanding or a strong conviction concerning its true nature. For in truth, the life that we are seeking cannot be achieved in the pursuit of all kinds of worldly and fleeting pleasures. It cannot be achieved through the accumulation of wealth or the acquisition of power or the endless enhancement of one's appearance. No, it cannot be achieved by these self-seeking ways. It can only be achieved through self-giving. It can only be achieved through love.

As we speak of loving and giving ourselves for others, we cannot but remember the words of Jesus in the Gospel who says that "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" (Jn 12:24). Pope Francis speaks of the same reality when he says: "Life grows by being given away, and it weakens in isolation and comfort. Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others."¹³² Moreover, he also observed that "the most beautiful and natural expressions of joy which I have seen in my life were in poor people who had little to hold on to. I also think of the real joy shown by others who, amid pressing professional obligations, were able to preserve, in detachment and simplicity, a heart full of faith. In their own way, all these instances of joy flow from the infinite love of God, who has revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ."¹³³ Indeed, the happiness that we seek cannot be attained by merely seeking for it. It can only be attained as a result of loving God and others.

Life in itself, inasmuch as it comes from God, is great. In spite of its imperfections, we still experience a glimpse of the happiness that we are seeking no matter how temporary they may be. And yet this reality is nothing compared to that which exists beyond it. Indeed there is a greater life beyond this life. And this greater life refers not only to God who is the source of everything, but also to the fact that we ourselves are destined to a life that is far more superior to the life that is perceptible to our senses. We are destined to be with God. We are destined to live the fullness of life.

¹³² Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 10.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, no. 7.

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