

## (2.10) Gratitude for Graces

Why do you look for rest when you were born to labor? *When you have done all you have been commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done what we were obliged to do.'*<sup>1</sup> Carry the cross patiently rather than seek consolation and bliss. What person is there who would not prefer to willingly receive solace and spiritual joy, if it were always available.

Spiritual consolations surpass all the delights of the world and all pleasures of the flesh. The delights of this world are either empty or tainted whereas spiritual delights are pleasant and honorable. They spring from virtue and are infused by God into minds that are virtuous, yet no man can enjoy these divine consolations at all times because periods of temptation are sure to follow.

False independence of mind and extreme self-confidence are clear deterrents to the heavenly visitation. *Indeed, many are the conceits of human beings; evil imagination leads them astray.*<sup>2</sup> God, however, generously gives grace of consolation, but man too often fails in not returning all again to God with thanksgiving. And this is the reason why the gifts of grace cannot continually flow in us; that we are ungrateful to the Giver and we neglect to return all to the Source. Grace will always be given to him that duly returns thanks, and what is to be given to the humble, shall be taken away from the proud. *"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*<sup>3</sup>

I would not have any such consolation as deprives me of compunction or steers me to pride. For all that appears high and lofty is not holy; nor is every pleasant thing good, nor is every desire pure; nor is everything that is precious to us pleasing to God. I willingly accept graces which always makes me more humble and fearful and more ready to renounce myself. He that has been taught by the gift of graces and instructed by the chastisement of its withdrawal will not dare attribute anything of good to himself, but will acknowledge himself as poor and naked. Even Jesus surprised the questioner when he said, *Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.*<sup>4</sup>

Give to God what is God's, and ascribe to yourself what is yours; that is, give thanks to God for his grace; but as to yourself, know how little is to be attributed directly to you. When Jesus was confronted about paying the temple tax he pointed to the image on a denarius and replied, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, but give to God what is God's."<sup>5</sup> Now ask the



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<sup>1</sup> Luke 17:10

<sup>2</sup> Sir 3:24

<sup>3</sup> James 4:6

<sup>4</sup> Matt 19:17, Mark 10:18, Luke 18:19

<sup>5</sup> Mark 12:14-17, Matt 17:24-27, Luke 20:22-25

question, "Whose image is on you?", i.e., in whose image were you created? Hence, it is clear we must return our all to our Creator! <sup>6</sup>

Put yourself in the lowest place, and the highest will be available to you; for the highest cannot exist without the lowest. Jesus taught this with the example of an invitation to a banquet when he said, *go and take the lowest place so that when the host comes to you he may say, 'My friend, move up to the higher position.'* Then you will enjoy the esteem of your companions at the table.<sup>7</sup> The Saints that are the highest in the sight of God are the lowest in their own eyes; and the more glorious they are, the more humble are they in themselves. Full of truth and the glory of heaven, they have no desire for empty glory. Being grounded and established in God, they can by no means be proud. And when men attribute to God whatsoever good they have received, they seek no glory from one another, but only that glory which comes from God; and they desire above all things that God may be praised in Himself and in all the Saints, and for that they are ever striving.

Be grateful for the least gift, and you shall be worthy to receive greater gifts. Let the least of gifts be to you as something very great, and accept these as a special favor. Consider the dignity of the Giver, and no gift will seem little for you since that cannot be trivial which is given by the Most High God.

Yes, though He allows suffering to come about, let it be acceptable to you, for whatever He allows to befall us, it is always done for our salvation. He that desires to retain the grace of God, let him be thankful for grace when it is given, and patient in suffering when grace is withdrawn. Let him pray that it may return but at the same time let him be wary and humble else he lose it.

This article is based on Book 2, Chapter10 of Thomas of Kempis' writing, "Imitation of Christ." It is not a translation, and there are many of those, but a personal reflection on his writing; if any of it helps give credit to Thomas of Kempis; if any of it fails the responsibility is mine. ( rfm)

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<sup>6</sup> Wisdom 2:23

<sup>7</sup> Luke 14:10