

BASIC CHRISTIANITY

Lecture No. 11

GRACE AND HOLY ORDERS

INTRODUCTION

Revised 3/1/04

As we said in the previous lecture, virtue is the gift of God, but we have a part to play in its development. Our part is to know what virtue is, to desire it and pray for it, and to practice it.

GRACE

What God gives us is himself. So grace is God's life being lived in the human soul. As St. Paul says, "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me." Grace is a supernatural power given by God to supplement the natural powers of man, in order that he might be able to live on a *supernatural* level.

"Supernatural" does not mean spooky but above the natural. For example, if I give my son two apples, one for him and one for his brother, and he gives the smaller one to his brother, that is just "natural". But if he gives him the bigger one, that is "supernatural".

Remember the illustration from the third lecture: dogs have the capacity for life with man, but they cannot domesticate themselves. And man has the capacity for life with God, but man cannot achieve it without God's help.

In some ways grace is like fuel: it needs to be replenished from time to time. Otherwise we quickly "run out" of it because of sin. If it were not for sin, we would be able to get by for eternity on our original supply.

Venial sins consume grace, burn it up, just as friction, wind resistance, etc., cause a car to burn up gasoline.

Mortal sin is like a hole in the gas tank. Instead of it going to the engine, all the gas gets dumped out on the ground.

There is only one grace, which is God's life, but he gives it to us under different circumstances. So we speak of different "kinds" of grace when what we are really talking about is *how* God gives it to us.

For example, *mystical* grace is grace which is received directly from God. *Sacramental* grace is that which is mediated through the things of God's creation.

SACRAMENTAL GRACE

- *A sacrament is an occasion in space and time in which man receives grace guaranteed by God.*

- *A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.*

- *A sacrament is an assured means of grace.*

We do not have sacraments in order to be able to receive grace. Men have always been receiving grace. But we have been given sacraments in order that we may receive grace under conditions, in which we may be *sure* that we have received it.

This is God's way of ministering to our condition of sin, our alienation from him. If we had sufficient faith we would not need sacraments. But then we would not sin either, and so God would not have to be renewing his grace in us.

We believe what we taste, touch, hear, see, or smell. So we need the assurance of outward acts. The really important things in life need to be externalized.

For example, a boy and a girl may have been going steady for months. And everyone else may assume they are going to get married. But until Johnny asks Mary to marry him and she says yes, they can still back out of it.

Non-catholic Christians mistakenly think they are rejecting magic when they reject the idea of sacraments. But there is a radical difference between magic and sacraments.

In magic one seeks to get power to make things happen *his* way.

Sacraments, on the other hand, are a source of power to make things happen *God's* way.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HOLY TRINITY

We have a three-way relationship with God. These three ways correspond to the three persons of the Holy Trinity:

- With God the Father, it is through prayer, preaching, and study—the intellectual way;
- With God the Son, it is through the historical experience of Jesus Christ;
- With God the Holy Spirit, it is through inspiration, i. e. the things of God as we know them without thinking about them.

God is one with himself. He is not going to contradict himself. So these three ways of knowing God reinforce and confirm each other.

INSPIRATION

Inspiration is the *natural* way for God to communicate with us—from his point of view. But it is not natural to us. To illustrate:

The king of Israel is thinking about going to war against the king of Syria. So he consults one of his prophets. The prophet tells the king that God will give him victory. The king asks him how

he knows that. The prophet says that last night he was sitting cross-legged on the hillside gazing at the stars, and he heard a voice say, "Tell the king he will be victorious."

But the king wants to be really sure. So he asks another prophet who tells him he will be defeated. When he asks that prophet how he can be so sure, that prophet says that last night he was sitting cross-legged on the hillside gazing at the stars and he heard a voice say, "Tell the king he will be defeated."

Which prophet is the king going to believe?

How do we authenticate inspiration? How do we discern whether it is the Holy Spirit or the enemy? There are spirits and there are spirits. Not everyone who is inspired is inspired by God. One of the most inspired, and inspiring, men of the twentieth century was Adolph Hitler. How do we tell if what we hear in a sermon or read in a book is really God's will? We check both our inspirations and our ideas against the historical reality of Jesus. If they do not square with him, they are not from God.

We do not want to worship a God we thought up. We do not want to worship a God we felt up. We want to worship the God that thought us up and revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ.

Jesus has made provision for bringing his objective, historical presence into every age and place. The *Apostolic Ministry* is the link which he has given us between himself and our own contemporary spiritual experiences and rational judgments.

So we check our experiences against those of the Church, not vice-versa.

THE APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

St. Matthew tells us that on the way to Jerusalem Jesus told the twelve disciples that they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. [Matt. 19:28]

St. Luke says that Jesus said the same thing to them at the Last Supper. [Luke 22:30]

And St. John says that at the Last Supper Jesus told them, "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare unto you the things that are to come.

"He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." [John 16:12]

On the evening of Easter day, that Sunday night, Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you." Then he showed them his wounds so they would be sure it was he. And then he said again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."

Then he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." [John 20:19-23]

By that act he made them *shaliachs* (Hebrew for “one who is sent”).

Among the Jews when someone was sent with authority to act in a certain matter, he was called a shaliach. They had a saying which went, “A man’s shaliach is, as it were, himself”. We would say that he had the “power of attorney” of the one who sent him.

The Greek translation of shaliach is *apostolos* (from *apo-stello*), or in English, *apostle*. So Peter and Paul begin their letters by identifying themselves as “apostles of Jesus Christ”.

St. Luke tells us in the first chapter of Acts that the night after the Ascension of Jesus and before the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the remaining eleven apostles chose someone to fill the position left vacant by Judas who had committed suicide.

Peter said it needed to be one of the men who had been with them all the way from the time of Jesus’ baptism by John through Jesus’ Ascension. That was so that he could be, with them, a witness to the Resurrection.

They narrowed it down to two men, equally qualified. One was named Joseph the son of Justus. The other was named Matthias.

Then they prayed and cast lots to see which one God wanted. “And the lot fell on Matthias; and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles.” [Acts 1:20-26]

The books of the New Testament make up the written account of the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise that the Holy Spirit would “lead them into all truth”.

The Apostolic Age ended just as the Jewish nation was being brought to an end by the Roman siege and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. During that period of forty years, the Apostolic Ministry continued to expand: Paul was added to the number and so was Barnabas.

The Apostolic Ministry consists of the original eleven apostles plus those whom the apostles added to their number beginning with Matthias and including all those since down to the present day.

Those added since the apostolic age are referred to as “bishops” instead of as “apostles,” because they exercise the Apostolic Ministry in a limited territory or jurisdiction. But the authority they exercise is the same as that of the original twelve.

Bishop Jack Iker, our bishop, is a member of the Apostolic College just as was Matthias.

Thus the bishops of the Church collectively, which is what we mean by the “Apostolic College”, have the responsibility of witnessing to that truth of Christ into which the Holy Spirit led the apostles and which is recorded in the books of the New Testament. So what a bishop may teach with apostolic authority is limited and controlled by Holy Scripture.

Bishops have the authority and the responsibility to apply Holy Scripture to new situations, but they may neither add to it, subtract from it, nor alter it.

The purpose of the training which men receive in a seminary is to insure that they know what the Church's authentic doctrine is. And to make sure that they have the integrity to teach the Church's doctrine rather than their own opinions.

But there is another reason for the Church's insistence on an authorized ministry. It is that the sacraments will be *valid*—dependably real. Through the Apostolic Ministry, Christ does instrumentally today the same actions which he did directly during his life on earth. We call those actions, sacraments.

The sacraments are effectual and dependable because those who perform them do so with the authority of our Lord himself. His apostles are, as it were, Himself.

Holy Orders, another term for the Apostolic Ministry, is the sacrament which makes possible the other sacraments, apart from baptism and marriage. And, in the case of baptism, it is what authenticates even baptism. That will be explained in the next class.

THE SYNAGOGUE

The first Christian congregations were *synagogues*, synagogues of the New Covenant. And they had a great deal in common with the synagogues of the Old Covenant.

The old synagogue was governed by a council of elders (in Greek, a *synedrion of presbyteroi*). They were set apart for that function by the ceremony of the laying-on-of-hands by those who were already elders.

Moses had chosen seventy elders to share the governance of the people, and they each received a share of the spirit which God had already given to Moses. [Numbers 11:16]

The council of elders of the old synagogue administered the Law (***Torah***) for the community. They also were responsible for teaching and explaining the Law.

On occasion, the elders would excommunicate certain Jews, "cast them out of the synagogue." And when that happened in gentile lands, even the gentile authorities would withdraw from that person all special Jewish privileges.

The council of elders administered communal taxes which were spent for the care of Jewish poor and Jewish strangers, for the upkeep of the local synagogues and school, and for the upkeep of the temple in Jerusalem.

The president of the council of elders was elected by the council annually.

The council of elders had no liturgical functions except those of ordinary laymen.

The worship of the synagogue consisted of selections read from the Old Testament with a commentary by a layman together with psalms and prayers.

If a well-educated Jew were present, he would be likely to be the one asked to read the lesson(s) and make the commentary. Jesus did that in the synagogue at Nazareth [Luke 4:16]

ff]. And this was a standard part of St. Paul's missionary tactics when he arrived in a new city.

This synagogue worship was presided over by "the ruler of the synagogue" who was a layman elected by the congregation.

He was the one who decided who would read and who would make the commentary, or, as we would say, who would "preach".

In Jerusalem, the council of elders was called the "Great Sanhedrin".

The president of the Great Sanhedrin was always the High Priest.

There were seventy-one elders recruited from the Aaronic priesthood and from rabbinically qualified laymen.

The Great Sanhedrin had jurisdiction throughout Judaea. And from time to time, it would send out apostles to synagogues in the "Dispersion", that is, in the gentile lands. Saul was such an apostle of the Sanhedrin when he left for Damascus to persecute Christians. Jesus appeared to him on the way to Damascus and Saul became "Paul, apostle of Jesus Christ."

After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the Great Sanhedrin was located in Jamnia, a city in the "Gaza Strip" near the coast. There it was presided over by the Jewish patriarch of Jamnia.

By the second century, the law and the practice was for new members of the Sanhedrin to be admitted through the laying-on-of-hands by the patriarch and two or more other elders. The patriarch could ordain without the elders and it would count. But the elders could not ordain without the patriarch.

The *rabbi* or *scribe* had no public function or authority in the synagogue worship. He was not an officer of the synagogue.

The "ordination" of a new rabbi by his own rabbinic teacher was a private act which amounted to a certification of his learning, etc. It was sort of like one's ceremony of graduation from college.

SYNAGOGUES OF THE NEW COVENANT

The synagogues of the New Covenant were based largely on the patterns of the Old Covenant synagogues.

In Jerusalem, the Christian community, the *new synagogue*, was governed by a sanhedrin of Christian elders presided over by James the Just (the brother of Jesus).

It had jurisdiction over the Christians of Palestine and influence, through its traveling delegates, over other Christians, especially over converts from Judaism.

In the churches of the Christian Diaspora (the Dispersion), there was a council of elders

whose primary function was to supervise and teach the local congregation [I Thess. 5:12; Rom. 12:8; Heb. 13:19; I Peter 5:2; Eph. 4:11; I Tim. 5:17, etc.]

Unlike the first Apostles, whose authority was directly from Christ, the elders, the presbyters, received their authority mediated through the Church, which had received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and at every subsequent baptism.

The worship of the Christian synagogue had an element which the Jewish synagogue's worship did not, and it was the more important element.

In addition to the Liturgy of the Word, there was the Eucharist itself.

The Eucharist was always presided over by the president of the council, called "the Overseer" (*episkopos*), who had been commissioned by the Apostle who had founded the congregation. His successors were ordained by neighboring overseers. (*episkopos* became *biskop* which became "bishop")

The bishops, the *episkopoi*, carried on the work of the apostles once the Apostolic Age had ended. The big difference between the two, as I said before, was that the apostles operated at large, founding and overseeing the development of new congregations, while the bishops had limited jurisdictions.

In each place where the Church was established, the pastor was the bishop. His governance of the community was shared by the council of elders chosen by the congregation but ordained by the bishop.

When he was present, the bishop was always the president, the *celebrant*, of the Eucharist. Only in his absence did a presbyter celebrate (*presbyteros* became *presbyter* which became *priest*).

During the Eucharist the elders—the priests—would sit on each side of the Bishop behind the Holy Table facing the congregation.

In addition to the bishop and the council of elders, there were also men and, at times, women chosen for the purpose of ministering to the needs of the poor and the sick, etc.

They also served as assistants to the Bishop, in which case they were men. Their title was "servant" or *diakonos*, from which comes our word deacon.

When a successor to a bishop was chosen upon his death, frequently it was a male deacon who was chosen (never a deaconess), because he would know the ropes, since he had served, perhaps for years, as the assistant to the Bishop.

THE DIOCESE

When whole towns began to be converted and there were too many members to assemble in one place at the same time, the Bishop would divide the city into sections and assign a presbyter to each section to preside at the Eucharist.

From then on, during the Eucharist, when the Bishop had consecrated the bread and wine, each deacon would receive a portion of the consecrated bread. Then they would take it to each of the eucharists which were being celebrated in the different neighborhoods by the presbyters.

When the deacon arrived, the presbyter would place the particle of the consecrated bread in the chalice. This symbolized that the “vitality” of the bishop’s celebration was extended to the others and thus the unity of the Eucharist was maintained.

The particle of consecrated bread which the deacon brought was called the *fermentum*. In time the practice of carrying the *fermentum* became less and less practical, and it eventually died out.

This dispersion of the council and the congregation is the origin of our present dioceses.

Since then we have repeated the primitive pattern in each local congregation to a considerable extent. So the pastor, who is now a priest (presbyter), is assisted by the vestry or mission council. This corresponds to the council of elders in the early Church. The wardens correspond in some ways to the deacons.

We have even authorized qualified laymen to do the things in the Eucharist which once only the deacons did, such as administer the chalice.

THE ORDERS OF MINISTRY

There are four orders of ministry within the Church. In the public worship of the Church each has its own role to perform, its proper “liturgy”

The bishop, when present, normally is the celebrant unless he delegates the privilege to a priest. The bishop can perform all the sacramental functions of the Church. Only he can confer order, that is ordain.

The priest may perform all the sacramental actions, except the conferring of order and the performing of certain blessings which are “reserved” to the bishop, such as the consecration of a church building.

The deacon can baptize, preach, and conduct some forms of public worship. In the Eucharist, his liturgy is to receive the people’s gifts at the offertory, to prepare the bread and wine on the altar, to read the Gospel, to administer the chalice to the people, and to pronounce the dismissal.

The only reason priests ever do these things is because there is no deacon present. Priests are still deacons after they are ordained priest. Bishops are still deacons and priests after being ordained bishop.

Confirmation has been called the ordination to the priesthood of the laity. The layman’s liturgy is to say all the responses including all the “Amens”. Sometimes he leads the prayers of the people and reads the lessons, except for the gospel.

In the action of the Eucharist, all four orders offer themselves and Christ to the Father.

PRIESTLY MEDIATION

A priest is the entrance into time and space by which God enters and acts. A priest has two lives; he faces two ways. He is a *mediator*.

Every major religion of the world has a priesthood, or has at some time—with only one exception: Islam.

Mediation is going to God and talking about Man, and going to Man and talking about God. In other words, prayer and preaching.

For example, imagine a quarrel between a husband and his wife. Nothing they say will help; they are estranged. The person who comes in and talks to each on behalf of the other and brings about a reconciliation is a mediator. What sinners need is mediation.

Priests are mediators. Their purpose is to link Man to God and vice-versa. This is what Christ did—and does. He reconciles; he makes at-one-ment.

Fundamentalists, such as Baptists, tend to think priests are there to *separate* Man from God by acting as sort of spiritual middlemen. Nevertheless, those same Baptists themselves work very hard at mediating, even if they don't call it that.

This notion also arises when priests are expected to have religion *instead of* the people. But, of course, as soon as there is that attitude Man and God are already separated.

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

It is customary to speak of the ministry of bishops, priests, and deacons as “the Apostolic Ministry”.

These three orders have three functions which all perform to a greater or lesser degree. They are *prophecy*, *priesthood* (proper), and *rule*. Together they are the mediation of the threefold nature of the Holy Trinity.

Prophecy is the mediation to Man of God the Father . It attempts to bring the human intellect into conformity with God's. Preaching and teaching are examples. It is the work of the whole Church. And when it is expected that only the clergy will teach your children the Christian faith, the children wind up ignorant.

Priestly ministry is the mediation to Man of God the Son in order to bring the human will, man's moral nature, into conformity with God's will.

Going from Man's side to God, it is sacrifice. It is the attempt to re-establish order in creation. It finds its fulfillment in the Eucharist where all life and existence is given back to God to be used by him as he sees fit. It is re-orientation.

Going from God's side to Man, it is the administering of discipline. This discipline is

primarily of the same kind as that of the control tower at an airport, voluntary.

Air traffic control works only because the pilots all want to avoid mid-air collisions and want to get down on the runway safely. Therefore, they cooperate with the controller and welcome his instructions, which are prescriptions for their welfare.

Rule, or regal ministry, mediates God the Holy Spirit.

When we hear the word “ruler”, we tend to think of someone who says “off with his head!”

My own first-grade teacher would spank our hands with a ruler when we misbehaved. But that is not what a ruler is for. Its real purpose is to serve as a standard of measurement.

The British royal family exercises no power. It simply rules. That is, its function is to set the standard, to be the standard family. And that is why the British get so upset when a prince or princess misbehaves. They are paid to behave. And we tend to expect our own “first family” to set a good example.

Jesus is our king. He rules by showing us how to be really human.

And it is the solemn and terrible duty of every Christian to demonstrate that God-filled life in front of the world, just as our Lord did.

That is one of the ways in which the Holy Spirit proceeds into the world.

Whoever would rule must first learn to obey. It is only the pattern that comes from God, ultimately, and to which he must conform himself, which entitles anyone to rule.

To summarize:

- Prophetic ministry is prayer and preaching. It mediates the Father.
- Priestly ministry is sacrifice and the discipline, the ordering, of the natural world back to God. It mediates God the Son
- Kingly, regal ministry, is praise and delight, and above all holiness of life.

The Church is exercising all three ministries in regard to the Gospel, when she tells about it, acts it out, and appreciates it.

THE VALIDITY OF THE SACRAMENTS

Sacraments are *assured* means of grace. So it is important to know when what may seem to be a sacrament is the real thing. Dollar bills will spend, unless they are counterfeit. How do you tell if a sacrament is genuine? There are four conditions which must be met.

- *Intention*: The minister must intend to do what the Church intends. Although it is desirable, it is not necessary for him to fully understand what that means.

- *Form*: The minister must use the proper form of words, or formula. This is a fundamental way of telling whether the minister has the proper intention.

For example, in baptizing, the minister uses the form which refers to the Holy Trinity that the Church has authorized to express her intention. If he simply poured water on the person's head and said, "Now don't get dirty again," it would not be a baptism, even if he intended it to be.

- *Matter*: The proper material and/or subject must be used.

Even if the right form is used, but, instead of water, rose petals are sprinkled on the person's head, it is not baptism.

You cannot baptize turtles. You cannot baptize a person who has been baptized already. And you cannot ordain a woman to the priesthood.

- *Minister*: The person officiating at the sacrament must have the authority to perform it, or there is no *assurance* of grace.

Except in Baptism and Holy Matrimony, the valid minister is always a bishop or a priest who has himself been validly ordained.

In marriage, the two people administer the sacrament to each other — for the rest of their lives.

In an emergency, any person can baptize. Then, when opportunity permits, the rest of the service is completed. Normally, however, it is done by a priest or bishop.

If there is any doubt about any of the four ingredients, the sacrament *may* be valid. But the whole point of the sacrament is to remove the *maybe* element.

THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

The ministry of the Church is Christ's ministry. Its function is to build up the body of Christ in unity. It is the organ of the Church's unity. Therefore, nothing must be done which weakens it in any way or casts doubt upon its validity.

It is the universal witness and teaching of the whole Church Catholic from the beginning that only males may be ordained priest or bishop. Only the whole Church is competent to depart from such universal teaching and practice.

Short of overwhelming universal consensus on the matter, there is grave doubt if a woman who has gone through an ordination service can actually consecrate the Eucharist. The most that could be said is "probably". But probably is not good enough.

CHRIST'S GIFT TO US

The ministry of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church of God is an essential part of the

Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is part of the good thing that God has given us.

The Apostolic Ministry is the means by which we are assured that Christ is doing in our midst, where we live, the very same saving, life-giving actions that he did when he walked the land of Palestine on the other side of the world two thousand years ago.