

WHAT ARE CATHOLICS?

Part 1: God's Children and Saints?

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(a) Called to be Saints.

Point 1.

“This is the Will of God, your sanctification.”

1 Thessalonians 4:3.

The country in which Our Divine Lord passed His life on earth was divided into three: Galilee to the north, to the south Judea, and in between, Samaria, the home of a people half Israelite, half pagan, who had broken with the Jews in Galilee and Judea, and had set up in opposition to the Temple in Jerusalem, a place of worship of their own. From this difference in religious matters came discord and bitterness between Jew and Samaritan. Each regarded the other as an outcast and a heretic.

If you did but know. (John 4:10)

When therefore at the opening of Our Divine Lord's public life he is journeying back from Judea to Galilee through the land of the Samaritans, He is received with distrust. It is about midday as He and His disciples approach the town of Sichar. The disciples go on into the town to try to get some food, but Christ is weary from His travelling and so He remains seated by a well outside. Presently a woman comes to draw water. She sees that this stranger is not a Samaritan, so ignoring Him she lets down her water-pot into the well by a rope. As she is hauling it up, Our Divine Lord speaks: “Give Me to drink,” He says quietly. The woman pauses and looks up: “How do You, being a Jew, ask of me to drink, who am a Samaritan woman?” she says, half in surprise, half in scorn. Christ's answer is strange. He goes straightway from the well-water He had asked for, to the refreshment that this poor sinner's soul needs so sorely: “If you did but know the gift of God,” He says, “and who it is that says to you, ‘Give me to drink,’ you would perhaps have asked of Him, and He would have given you living water.” (John 4:10)

“If you did but know the gift of God” — it is the aim of these pages to make known more fully “the gift of God” that is summed up in that great title, “A Catholic.” What does it mean to be a Catholic, what is his greatness, his privileges, his nobility? Instead of dwelling on what a

Catholic should or should not do, it is useful at times to dwell instead on what a Catholic, in spite of his faults and unworthiness, actually is, what God in His all-pitying love has made him. For he is one raised to an extraordinary greatness, a greatness which can find fitting expression only in what is best, in loyal service and perfect fulfilment of duty. “To whom much is given, of him much shall be required.” (Luke 12:48).

What then is a Catholic? “The Church,” says the catechism, “is the union of all the faithful, who being baptized, profess the same Faith, partake of the same sacraments, and are governed by their lawful pastors under one visible head on earth.” A Catholic is a member of this body. He enters it by Baptism. On the authority of God, he holds in common with his fellow-Catholics the true Faith. He receives through the sacraments the strength to live up to this Faith, and he is protected and guided by priest and Bishop and Pope — unity of Baptism, unity of Faith, unity of sacramental life, unity of authority. The Church is visible and all these are so many of its outward, visible signs. The Church is visible, and yet its whole reality and purpose and endeavour is not just external display; there is the inner, deeper life, which is but faintly manifested thus, the deeper reality. Catholicism is not just a matter of external observance, of superficial conformity with others. It is not even merely an ethical code, a collection of regulations about right and wrong. It is something much more vital, something which goes down into the inmost fibres of our being, physically and really ennobling us. Above all is this true of the Catholic who lives his Faith. In his soul there is wrought a marvellous handiwork of God. What, then, is this handiwork? What is this nobility that gives the soul of a true Catholic its greatness? Such a soul is said to be in the state of sanctifying grace — what does this mean?

What we shall have to say in these pages with reference to the transformation wrought in the soul by grace can be true also of many non-Catholics who through no fault of their own are as yet outside the Church. With such souls, however, we are not concerned here.

A Sharer in God’s Life.

“Grace” — everyone knows the meaning of bodily grace. If a person is said to be ‘graceful’, there is implied beauty, comeliness, ease and perfection of action and movement, beauty in strength. Sanctifying Grace is all this in a far fuller and deeper sense.

It gives the soul suddenly a surpassing beauty, a beauty of no merely natural order. It gives it too the ability to do deeds that are above all human powers, and it makes it holy, pleasing to God.

“Sanctifying,” — the word means “holy-making”. Sanctifying Grace is the gift that makes the soul something truly sacred, for it makes it a sharer in the very life of God Himself.

A true Catholic is a sharer in God’s life. To understand this, it will help to climb very patiently, step by step up the ladder of creatures, striving to know more fully God, and this gift of God that make a true Catholic. Everyone knows what is meant by a living thing. “Consider,” said Our Divine Lord, “the lilies of the field, how they grow. . . .” “Behold the birds of the air.” The lilies

of the field, flowers growing in a meadow, — their roots hidden in the brown earth, their green leaves open to the air and the sunlight — they drink in nourishment and so they gradually grow and unfold. They are nobler than the brown earth, or the rocks or the air. These things are lifeless; the lilies have life. “Behold the birds of the air.” They too have life, but have it more abundantly. Like the lilies, they take in nourishment and so grow and develop, but they can do more. They can see and feel, and seeing and feeling they can desire, and desiring they can seek. “Are not you of much more value than they?” Yes, indeed, for man has life more fully than the lilies of the field or the birds of the air. Man can know and love and seek after beauties invisible — to the brute beast — the beauty of knowing, the beauty of making, the beauty of living as a man should live.

Four steps of the upward ascent have been climbed already. Dead and lifeless things are cleft apart by an abyss from things that live. Dead and lifeless things can be pushed and pulled — they do not move of themselves. Moss creeping over a rock by its very growing shows that it is greater than the rock. Living things are not just pulled and pushed; they can also pull and push themselves. Life is the power of self-movement. But life can be had more and more abundantly. It is first stirring in the plants and the trees, but as yet very imperfectly. It is more fully in the brute beasts, in birds and fish and animals; more fully still in man. On the plane above men, are the angels — living beings of wondrous beauty. More abundantly still than man do they possess life. But over all of these, infinitely greater and more perfect and more beautiful is He from Whom came all these things, He the boundless fountain of life, He Who is Life itself. “In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God and in Him was life.” (John chapter 1.)

Now, to make a strange supposition, suppose that a plant, while remaining a plant, were to be given the gift of sight, such a plant would share in a superior life, it would have gained a more abundant life, it would have been gifted with something above its own natural powers. Or again, if a brute were to be endowed with the power of reasoning, it too would be elevated or lifted up to a fuller life, lifted above its ordinary natural powers. If man were similarly to be allowed to share in the life of the angels, he too would receive an immense favour. But if man were to be allowed to share in God’s own life, if he were to be lifted up so as to know and love, in some way as God Himself knows and loves, here indeed would be a life had, and had more abundantly, this sharing in a life so utterly above man, something completely and utterly wonderful.

A Dazzling Fact.

It is fanciful to think of a plant being able to see, of a brute being able to reason. It is a fact, a dazzling, awe-inspiring fact, that we human beings, we Catholics once we are in the state of grace, are lifted up by God to share in His own divine life; that we are given powers of knowing and loving in some way as He knows and loves; that we are given a new life superadded to our normal human life and this life is called grace.

Again and again, Our Divine Lord spoke of this life. It was for this He came, for this He toiled, for this He suffered and died and rose again — that He might destroy death, the death of sin, and

give us life. “I am come,” He said, “that they may have life and have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10). “That they may have life,” that they may have a vitality, a vital force, a power of self-movement, a power to know and love — but not just in a normal, human way, but “more abundantly” — in a divine way. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” — the Way, by His example, the Truth, by His teaching, the Life “because in Him was life and of His fullness we have all received.” Is not indeed all Catholicism, are not all the prayers and Masses and Holy Communion, all the vast labour and organization of the Church, all the efforts and cares of Pope and Cardinals, of Archbishops and Bishops, of priests and nuns and laity, all directed towards the preservation, the development, the increase, the intensification of this life, which should one day unfold into the very knowledge and love of God face to face?

To ensure this, has not Christ given Himself in the Blessed Sacrament as the fitting nourishment of this divine life? “Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you shall not have life in you. He that eats My flesh, and drinks My blood, has everlasting life. . . . As the living Father has sent Me, and I live by the Father so He that eats Me, the same also shall live by Me.” (John 6: 53-58).

Point 2.

“You shall be as gods.”

This life which Catholics as God’s children receive from the Heavenly Father through the merits of Christ, carries with it too a likeness to God. Sons are like their father, so too do God’s children receive with and through grace a likeness to God. At the dawn of the history of the human race stand Adam and Eve. Endowed with wonderful gifts of body and soul, they were to work out their salvation with ease and joy. Still, heaven was not to be forced on them, but won at the cost of their own personal efforts aided by grace. A trial had to be undergone. Of the fruit of all the trees in Paradise they might eat save only of one. If they ate of this, they were warned, a dire punishment would fall on them. It was a serious command. To disobey was to do something grievously wrong and they knew this.

Then came the devil: “Why has God commanded you that you should not eat . . . ?”

And to Eve answering, “Lest we die”, he gave the lying assurance: “No, you shall not die the death . . . you shall be as gods knowing good and evil.”

“You shall be as gods . . .” — a strange temptation, a strange fascination. It beguiled Eve. She took and ate and fell. “You shall be as gods,” — that strange futile-seeming promise, is yet made to us truly and really by the Source of all truth, by God Himself. God, as it were, bows down to our whims and raises us up to be like Himself, to share in His Divine Nature, to be like Him in a new and deeper and fuller way.

“Who is Like to God?” Who indeed can compare in strength or power or majesty with God? And yet the mysterious truth remains, that in the soul in grace there is a likeness to God, there is a real and true sharing in the very Nature of God Himself.

God's Footprints and God's Image.

Turn again to the things in the world of sense — they help to the understanding of a little of this mystery. Think for a moment of the lovely things that are in the world, the beauty of sunshine creeping over hillsides changing black to grey, to brown, to gold; leaves breaking gently over trees stirring from their winter sleep; bird-song burst; of poppies blazing in a summer noon; the calm of evenings — what are all these things but the faintest shadows of God's infinite beauty? The whirling heavens tell of His power. The unfolding of acorn, earth-enwrapped, into a tiny plant, a sapling, a great oak, speaks of His infinite provident care. A little flower peeps up from the grass and whispers God's loveliness. And yet in all these things what are there but traces, vestiges, footprints, as it were, left by God passing by? "Yes, this way went He," can we say, "and if these things are so beautiful, how much more beautiful must He be who made them?" Yet how little of His true nature do we glimpse, how little of Himself as He really is.

In man, even un-lifted as yet to his newer life, in man with mind looking before and after, with will able to choose among the good things about him that attract, but do not compel, is found a closer likeness to God. The smile on a child's face, kindness, friends, the love of a mother, a father's courage — these again are traces of God's beauty, but fuller, truer. Man is an image of God. He is a picture, small and imperfect, yet somehow more like to God than anything in the rest of the world. All the other things shall pass away. Man's soul will remain, a sharer in God's own timelessness.

But this picture, this image of God, which, is in man's soul by nature, what is it to the likeness in his soul lifted up by grace? Now no longer is there a mere vestige, no longer an image merely, but a likeness, a reflection mirroring forth God's own very Nature.

A footprint in the sand reveals that someone has passed by but tells little about him. A picture or painting tells more, his features, his appearance, his dress, But his likeness in a mirror, how much fuller can he be seen now, how much more truly. The footprint in the sand is, as it were, all man knows of God from the material world. In man's soul, he finds a picture. But in that soul, living with the life of grace the very Godhead is reflected: it is in a special way the image of God an image not dead, not lifeless, but living — the living image of the Divine Nature.

"Mirror of Justice" is Mary, the Sinless Mother of Divine Grace. "Mirror of Justice," too, in a lesser way is the soul of every true Catholic.

When then a little child is baptized, its soul does not become God, it does not cease to be a human soul, but it does become godlike. It is transformed. It becomes a sharer in the divine nature; and this, not in any merely figurative, fanciful way, but physically and really. When the sinner receives absolution, when he steps out of the confessional, God's forgiveness sounding in his ears and a newfound peace and happiness in his heart, his will is once more united and in harmony with God's will. He wants to do what God wants, he wants to avoid sin. But his very soul too is

changed. It has received back its divine life, its divine likeness. A divine change has come in this soul. Here again comparisons may help.

Point 3. Simple Comparisons.

Wax, such as at times is used to seal letters or parcels, ordinary sealing wax, is something trivial. Yet once the great seal of a king has left on it its imprint, the wax is transformed. No longer is it unimportant; it now carries all the king's authority. Attached to a proclamation it gives to it value and genuineness and binding force. Men's souls are as wax, feeble, fickle, yet the Holy Spirit comes to sign and seal these souls — and lo, of a sudden, they are wondrously important and precious: they carry the very stamp of God.

“Whose sign and superscription is this?” asked Christ when they proffered Him a coin.

“Caesar's,” they replied.

“Render then to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.”

“Whose sign and seal is on the soul?”

“God's.”

“Render then to God what is God's.”

A piece of iron is of itself cold and black and hard. Cast it into the fire and in a little while, it is changed all through. It is now no longer cold, but glowing with heat. It is no longer dull and black, but fiery red. It is no longer hard, but can be bent and moulded. The iron does not cease to be iron, and yet how different it has become. The human soul too of itself is cold and black and hard, but once cast into the furnace of God's charity its chill disappears, it is filled with fire, the fire of divine love; it is enflamed with charity; it is no longer irresponsive to God's wishes, but pliant in His hands and prompt and ready to do His holy will.

To take an even simpler example, a homely, everyday one. See an **electric bulb**, its shape, the glass, clear and even and round, and inside, the fine metal thread or filament. By itself how dull it is and useless. Ask someone what it is for.

He will answer: “To give light.”

Yet all the world's bulbs of themselves would not light up the smallest space. A change must come. The bulb must be fitted into a socket and connected with a source of power. Through that tiny filament must pass a current of electricity. Now the bulb glows blindingly bright and illuminates all about it. Blindingly bright — and yet how dark beside a soul in the state of grace, a soul through which flows the current of sanctifying grace, the current that comes to us from God through the great power-house of Christ's Sacred Passion.

“In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God. In Him was light and the light was the life of the world. . . .” (John chapter 1.)

“You are the light of the world.”

“You were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord.” (Ephesians 5:8).

A Thorough Change.

The change in the soul when it receives grace is a change through and through. It is not just as if it were painted on the outside or merely dressed up in a beautiful garment. No, the change goes much deeper; it is much more intimate. As the iron in the fire, as the filament in the bulb are transformed through and through, much more so is the soul.

It takes on a new likeness, a likeness to God's own divine nature. This then is God's great gift to the Catholic, this the vital force of Catholicism.

One day a Chinese schoolboy, but recently baptized was asked: "What is the most precious thing in the world?"

"Sanctifying Grace," he replied, and rightly.

It is on this, as has been said, that all the efforts of Christ and His Church converge. The Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity became man in order that by sharing our nature we might come to share in His. Daringly and lovingly do the great saints stress this truth.

"He became man," cries Saint Athanasius, "that we might become gods."

And again, "The Son of God tasted death that the sons of man might be made sharers in the life of God."

And Saint Augustine: "He descended that we might ascend. Whilst keeping His own divine nature, He partook of our human nature, that we, whilst keeping our own nature, might become partakers of His."

And the Prince of the Apostles, speaking with God's own authority and inspiration, tells us that through our Redeemer we are made "sharers in the divine nature." (2 Peter 1:4.)

In every Mass too, this same truth is proclaimed. At the Offertory, the priest unveils the chalice and placing it to one side offers up the host on the paten. Then, moving over to the right-hand side of the altar where the server is waiting with the cruets, the priest takes the chalice, dusts it lightly inside and pours in a little wine. Next, perhaps with a spoon, he lets a drop or two of water fall into the chalice. For a moment, the water can be seen against the amber of the wine. Then it disappears, dissolved and commingled, and the priest, using the rubrics of Saint Pius V, prays: "O God, who did wonderfully create the dignity of human nature, and did renew it still more wonderfully, grant us through this mystic rite of wine and water to be sharers in the divinity of Him who deigned to become a sharer in our humanity, Jesus Christ, Your Son, Our Lord." [The prayer of the rubrics of Blessed Paul VI is "By the mystery of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of Christ, who humbled Himself to share in our humanity."]

Point 4.

(The dignity and responsibility.)

This then is what it means to be a Catholic. It means an undreamt of dignity. It means that to the soul there is given a new vital force, a new life that enables it to do things it could never do by itself, that enables it in very fact to live a life truly divine. The soul does not cease to be; rather does it now live more fully, more abundantly, being made a sharer in the divine nature.

Time and time again, the great apostle, Saint Paul addresses his converts as “Saints,” or “Called to be Saints.” Like his Divine Master, Saint Paul knew what was in man, man’s frailty, man’s perversity. These converts but yesterday were sunk in paganism. Some of them were dwellers in Corinth, the proverbial city of vice of those days. Yet through God’s mercy, they had entered the Church, they were believers, they were sharers, sharers in Infinite Holiness, “Saints” indeed and “Called to be Saints.” This was true of these early Christians; it is still true. Sanctity is not just for the few, but for all. It is not the preserve of priests and brothers and nuns. Whatever be one’s work in life, whether it be heavy manual labour, or office work, or business, or profession, or home life, whether one be old or young, poor or rich, holiness is not merely possible for everyone, it is expected of everyone. The divine life that through grace is in the soul must not be left idle. It is the law of life that it must act or it will wither and die. It must act, and by action grow and increase and be perfected. So too the holiness that comes through grace must be exercised, must grow.

Pius XI’s Call.

Pius XI, great man of action, in one of his earliest messages to the Universal Church appealed to all Catholics to realize this. “All who accept the Church’s guidance,” he wrote, “should by the command of Christ do all in their power to sanctify their lives. As Saint Paul says, ‘This is the will of God, your sanctification.’ Christ Himself has taught in what this sanctification consists, ‘Be ye therefore perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect.’ We cannot accept the belief that this command of Christ concerns only a select and privileged group of souls. Quite the contrary is true. This law embraces all men and admits of no exception.” (A.A.S. [*Acts of the Apostolic See*] 1923, page 50).

We are to do “all in our power to sanctify our lives.” It is not to be a matter of half-hearted, spasmodic attempts, but a goal constantly and eagerly striven for. Christ’s command does not concern only a select and privileged group of souls — there are no exceptions. “We all must become saints,” wrote a young, airman, Jean du Plessis de Grenédan, killed in the airship *Dixmude* in 1923 after a heroic career as an aviator in the Great War, “it is the very aim of life. What is the use of concealing it from ourselves and from others!”

Later in the troubled pontificate of Pius XI, to the sorrows of the troubles in Mexico and Russia were added the heart-rending tragedy of Spain and its civil war and the cynical breaking of Concordats by several nations (most notably by Nazi Germany).

The aging Pope for the first time broke under the strain and became deadly ill. For a time his life, was despaired of, but, in early 1937, he rallied and once again the Lion of the Vatican faced Christ’s enemies. There were great evils in Europe. There were evils threatening the soul of Europe, evils deeper and far more dangerous than all the squabbles about trade and treaties and territories. So quite suddenly one March morning of 1937 the call came from the Pope to Catholics to stiffen, not against the reorganization of their countries, not against political reform

and economic improvement — these things they must help and encourage — but against the attack on Christ and His Church, the ceaseless, insidious, nagging attack on all things Catholic. Within one week, two successive encyclicals condemned both Nazism and Communism.

In a wonderful message came the burning words: “Today we earnestly repeat: It is not enough to be counted a member of the Church of Christ; one must also be a living member of the Church — in spirit and in truth. And only they are such who are in the grace of the Lord and ever walk in His presence — in innocence or in sincere and efficacious penance. . . . A Christianity that enters into itself in all its members, that strips off all mere outward show and worldliness, that takes the commandments of God seriously, and proves itself in love of God and active love of one’s neighbour, can and must be the pattern and leader to a world sick to its very heart and seeking for support and guidance, if unspeakable misfortune and a cataclysm beyond all imagining is not to burst over it.” (Pius XI, *Mit brennender sorge*.)

The unspeakable misfortune has, however, come; the cataclysm has burst over the world and now this cry of the Pope for sterling Catholics is the cry of the world itself; the poor, broken world for all its love of passing things is crying out for saints; it expects from Catholics holiness, great holiness. But for those who do not live up to their Faith, for Catholics who do not take their standards from Christ but from the world, that world has only cynical contempt, contempt for the Church, contempt for the Faith, contempt for Christ Himself. “Christ’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles” because of pallid, lukewarm Catholics.

He who has not God’s grace in His soul is but a poor sort of Catholic; at heart, he is a traitor to the cause of Christ. His own self-interest, above all God’s kindness speaking through the wounds of the dying Christ should lead him to a deep and lasting sorrow for his sins. Then, once grace is in his soul, he must live up to his calling; he must “walk worthy of God in all things pleasing.” (Colossians 1: 10). For is he not in truth infinitely obliged? “*Noblesse oblige*” — God’s very life is in some way pulsing in his soul, no paltry service will do — we are obliged by the greatness and nobility of our calling.

“*Acknowledge, O Christian, your dignity, and being made a sharer in the Divine Nature, do not fall back by unworthy deeds into your former vileness.*” (Saint Leo).

(b) God’s Children.

**“Behold what manner of charity the Father has bestowed on us
that we should be called and should be the Sons of God.”**

(1 John 3:1).

Paschal-tide of the first year of Our Divine Lord’s public life finds Him in Jerusalem and soon, by His words and by the divine kindness of His miracles many are drawn to Him. Among these, during this first public ministry Passover, is one of the very Pharisees themselves, a member of the supreme council of the Jews, “a master in Israel,” by name Nicodemus. He is deeply moved

by the many wonders wrought by this teacher from Galilee. He is attracted by His kindness. His interest is aroused by His reserve. Still Nicodemus is afraid of what people may say. He must not compromise himself. So it is only when night falls that, muffled up from prying eyes, he makes his way quietly through the narrow winding streets of the city. Outside a certain house, he pauses. The street is almost deserted. He knocks gently. In a moment, the door is opened and he finds himself in the presence of Christ. We can see them then, seated on either side of a little table, the flickering light of a little lamp casting strange shadows across their faces — the Pharisee, an oldish man whose lips twitch with nervous fear, and God incarnate, the gentle Christ, younger by many years than His companion, but ever the Divine Master.

Nicodemus is seeking light, but as yet, he is timid and afraid. Later on, he will show more courage. Nettled by the unjust plotting against Christ, he will speak out in His defence in the very Sanhedrin session “Does our law judge any man, unless it first hear him . . . ?” (John 7: 51) Later still, in the hour of greatest desolation, when the apostles have fled and Christ has died crucified, throwing all care to the winds Nicodemus will come publicly to help in the sad burial. (John 19:39).

Born Again.

But now he is talking for the first time face to face with Christ.

“Rabbi,” he says, “we know that You are come as a teacher from God; for no man can do these signs which You do, unless God be with him.” (John 3:2).

In answer, Christ lifts up this man’s thoughts from visible miracles to invisible wonders wrought in the soul. “Amen, amen I say to you, unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

“Born again” — these are puzzling words to Nicodemus.

There is a trace of irritation in his reply. “How can a man be born again, when he is old?”

But the Divine Master insists, “Amen, amen I say to you, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

“Unless a man be born again. . . .” Christ spoke these mysterious words at the first meeting with this stranger. Surely then we of the household of the Faith, we with our many years of instruction, may hope humbly and lovingly, and imploring the light of the Holy Spirit, to grasp a little of their marvellous meaning.

Stand now for a moment by a Baptismal font. A little child is brought robed in white. The priest questions and, in the child’s name, the sponsors or god-parents, along with the parents, answer. In the child’s name, they undertake the duties of our faith. In its name, they lay claim to the reward surpassing great that will attend the fulfilment of those duties. Several small ceremonies follow. The salt for prudence, the exorcisms, the oil for active service, all the beautiful prayers and ceremonies lead up to the great moment.

The child is given a Christian name, the name of one of Christ's heroic followers, as a pledge and an earnest that one day it too will take its place among the saints; and now the Baptismal water, flow across that tiny head and brow: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

"Amen, amen I say to you, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." A few days ago, this tiny baby opened its eyes for the first time on this world. From that day dates its life, but its natural life only. Now, as the baptismal waters flow, as the child is lifted up and the gleaming drops are dabbled off, a much more wonderful life begins in that soul. It is born again, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:11). It has received its second birth and all its great privileges and duties. Baptism is the sacrament, which makes us Christians, children of God and heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven. The soul after Baptism, the soul in the state of grace is in a special way a child of God. This then is another prerogative of the inner Life of a true Catholic.

Point 1. (God's own.)

God has made us: we are His. More than the painting belongs to the artist, more than the sunbeam belongs to the sun, do we belong to God. We are His effects, His property, His chattels. He owns us utterly, and by our very fibre are we bound to Him. How intimate is our relationship with Him and yet how remote! Intimate — for there is not the tiniest particle of our being that does not owe itself to Him; does not at every moment depend on Him. And yet remote — further than servant from master, further than slave from overlord, is creature from Creator; are we of ourselves from God. To do His behests are we bound, to do His will and never slacken in His service is our common duty, but right or claim to special reward we have none. "When you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: 'We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which we ought to do'." (Luke 17:10).

Bridging the Gulf.

But God in His love for us has wished to bridge over the gulf between mankind and Himself, He has wished to draw us closer to Himself. And so the waters of Baptism flow, washing away sin and regenerating, giving life anew, by the birth that is not of flesh, but of the Spirit, and now servitude is changed into son-ship. We remain God's chattels, and yet by His mercy we become His children, His adopted children. A beginning is made of the intimacy that is destined for us in Heaven. "You have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear;" Saint Paul tells the Christians of Rome, "but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry, 'Abba, Father'." (Romans 8:15).

"You have not received the spirit of bondage." The spirit of slavery, the servile drudge-spirit that obeys only from fear, only because what is commanded must be done in order to avoid punishment. We have received through Christ something nobler than this; we have received the spirit of sons, a truly filial spirit, that leads us to look up to God not as to a hard taskmaster, but as

to a loving father, that leads us to do His will, to keep his commandments, not just out of fear, but above all out of love, out of a desire of pleasing Him whom we address as “Abba, Father.”

“When the fulness of time was come,” Saint Paul says again, “God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, that He might redeem them who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” (Galatians 4:4.)

“God sent His Son . . . that He might redeem them who were under the law” — the Jews — but the Jews rejected Him, and to us have come instead the gifts. “God sent His Son . . . that we might receive the adoption of sons.”

“He came unto his own and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him He gave them power to be made the sons of God.” The Babe of Bethlehem nestles in Mary’s arms — her baby. He has come to take away our sins and make us share in His own Son-ship. He has come to make us adopted sons of God.

Point 2. Adoption.

Recall what adoption means among men. Some little waif, some orphaned mite is taken into a household, is fed and clothed, educated and cherished as one of the family. The little one so adopted takes its name from its adopting parents. At times, it is given even the right to inherit what belongs to those who have thus bestowed their love. And such a child comes to feel at home in this strange house. It learns the ways of its foster-father and mother. Its very manner of speech, its actions, its bearing gradually come to reflect and re-echo their voice, their outlook, their way of acting. The child learns an interest in the things that interest them. Their friends become its friends. Their welfare becomes its concern. And if these parents are of noble blood, the adopted child little by little rises to the noble thoughts and ambitions befitting a member of such a family.

Now note, such a husband and wife are not forced to admit the little one into the family. The child has no claim on them. They act quite freely; what they do is something of their own choosing. Sometimes they act thus just out of sheer goodness and generosity. Death perhaps has struck suddenly and cruelly and left a homeless orphan. The adopting parents already have children of their own, yet out of selfless pity they freely undertake to care for even one more. So it is at times. But very often, there is mingled with this wholly unselfish kindness, a very real need on the part of the husband and wife. God has not blessed them with the children for which they longed, or perhaps He has already taken such children to Himself by death. The table is empty of little faces and a woman’s heart aches for a little one on whom to lavish her love. So from somebody in need, or from some institution, they choose a child, one that is well-mannered, sweet-dispositioned, pleasing, and undertake the child’s upbringing and education.

God has adopted us.

And we human beings, of ourselves what are we but homeless waifs? Orphaned by the fall of our first parents, by the death they incurred through their disobedience, by the loss of the life of

sanctifying grace, we are left wandering hungry and wretched in this valley of tears, without a right or a claim on heaven. But God does not leave us orphans. He adopts us as His own. From outcasts and strangers, we become members of the family circle of God, ‘members of God’s household’, “*domestici Dei*” as Saint Paul puts it. (Ephesians 2:19). We share in the rights and privileges of God the Son Himself. Food, clothing, education are provided for us. Food — the Eucharistic Food, Christ our Lord Himself, true God and true man, comes in Holy Communion to nourish our souls, to strengthen them, to enable them to grow in grace and become ever stronger and more beautiful. With Christ too, as Saint Paul tells us, are we clothed; and through Him and from Him do we receive our instruction, our education. From Him speaking in His Church and in our hearts we learn ever more fully what beseems us as God’s children. With all this too goes our right, our strict right, once the life of grace is in our souls, to our share in the inheritance of God the Son, our right to the inexhaustible riches and happiness of Heaven.

Why does God do this? Is he like those childless parents who long for children of their own? No, indeed, for Almighty God has no needs. There is nothing that He lacks. Has He not His Only-Begotten Son in Whom He is well-pleased, in Whom His love finds the uttermost of all that a Son should be? The very intensity of their mutual love, the love of Father for Son and Son for Father, the very throb of their infinite affection is God Himself, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Love, the Third Person of the Most Holy Trinity. No, it is not from the need of us, but from sheerest kindness and generosity that he adopts us as His own. And further, He does not choose us because of our winning ways, or our sweet disposition, or from any merit or excellence on our side. He makes us holy and pleasing by adopting us.

Point 3.
A New Nature.

And now let us advance one step further. Human adoption may be an act of wonderful love and kindness. It may bring untold blessings to the orphan that is adopted. Externally and perhaps too in character the child may gradually come to be in many ways like its adopting parents. Yet, after all, deep down the difference remains. The child is not of the same blood. All its deepest characteristics are inherited from its real parents. It is their blood that flows in its veins, their features that are reflected in its face. Adoption has brought no fundamental change in the child’s physical make-up. With such a poor way of adopting God is not satisfied. He is not satisfied with any mere legal fiction. He goes further. Earthly parents communicate their human nature to their children, so in a spiritual and much more wonderful way does God communicate to us a new and higher nature, a spiritual super-nature which is none other than a sharing in His own, none other than that divine life, divine likeness, divine transformation which we considered in the last part.

More fully now can we understand Saint John’s great words “Behold what manner of charity the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called, and should be, the sons of God.” (1 John 3:1).

“What manner of charity” — no need on God’s side, on our side less than nothing, no claim to His pity, no right to His mercy, deserving only punishment for our many sins. And from this

infinitely merciful love come, Saint John tells us, the great benefits, first “that we should be called God’s sons,” and secondly “that we should be His sons”. To be called a child of God, just as an honorary title, just as an external convention were an immense favour; but this, our title, is not just something external and imaginary; we are not merely called, we *are* the sons of God.

If only we could scale off the crust of convention that has gathered over these words by long familiarity, and see their wondrous meaning, hear as it were for the first time the words “We Catholics are God’s children,” not passing them by as an outworn formula grown meaningless by constant use, but receiving them with a thrill of wonder and joy and great holy ambition. For “truly” as Saint Leo says, “this gift exceeds all gifts that God should call man, ‘son’, and that man should call God, ‘Father’.” (*Sermon 4. On the Nativity*). To be a true Catholic, then, is to be a child of God, not indeed by any right of earthly birth, but by adoption. And yet this son-ship is more than a mere title. It brings a real change, which is a rebirth, a regeneration. Physically the soul enters into a new and intimate relationship with God. A Catholic who is vividly penetrated by this truth will live up to his calling; especially will his filial love of God show itself in a great devotion to prayer and in a fervent desire to do great things for God in the world.

Point 4.

Prayer — Conversation with God.

A son who loves his father will turn to him frequently; will be happy in his company. He will ask him about his wishes and his plans. He will tell him his troubles and needs, and ask for advice and help. What is prayer but conversation with God? All the intimacy, all the trust, all the frankness that exist between a really sincere and affectionate son and a noble and wise and kind father will be found in the prayer of the true Catholic. “God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts crying, ‘Abba, Father’.”

“When you pray,” Christ tells us, “say: ‘Our Father’.” (Matthew 6: 9). And again, “Unless you become as little children you shall not enter into the Kingdom of God.” As little children then, do we turn to our Heavenly Father.

“Our Father,” we pray, and already our heart is warmed with tenderness and trust; servile fear is left behind, and coldness, and diffidence. “Our Father,” we pray, and God Himself looks down from Heaven on us, His little ones, looks down on us with pity, and with a great, tender, enfolding love. “Our Father,” He is, in truth, the perfect Father, from whom, as Saint Paul says, all paternity is named in heaven and on earth. All the kindness and strength and interest and care of human fathers are all to be found in perfection in Him.

In the perfect prayer, God’s interests are first attended to; only in the second place come our own wants. In all our prayers let us try to keep this order. They should be something more than a collection of requests. Still petition rightly finds a large place. “You have not hitherto asked anything in My name,” said Christ to His apostles. “Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.” And again: “Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be

opened unto you.” So it has been for all of us. Our Heavenly Father has heard our prayers most wonderfully times out of number. Even quite trivial requests has He granted again and again.

“Unanswered” Prayers.

Still — let us face the difficulty squarely — you will meet at times people who say: “I prayed; I begged; I made Novena after Novena; I went to Mass morning after morning, and still God refused to grant what I asked. All my prayers were wasted.”

What shall we say? Well, first, your very importunity, your urgent, unflagging prayer over this long time, has itself been a great gift of God. Nothing is wasted. All those prayers, those Masses, those Novenas, have helped to make your soul more and more holy and have stored up for all eternity inexhaustible riches in heaven. Nothing is wasted. You have obeyed Christ’s command. You have kept on praying. Christ will not let your fidelity go unrewarded.

But you have not received what you prayed for. Not perhaps this or that triviality but He has given lavishly what you need most, strength and perseverance. But again, the difficulty comes back; He has not granted what you asked. You have perhaps seen a child, attracted by the gleam and glitter, begging from his father an open razor: You have seen the father refuse. Does it show that the father does not love his son?

Nay rather does his love shine forth the more in his very refusal. He would be cruel, harsh, unfeeling, were he to grant this passing whim. By refusing, the father hears most fully the deepest desire of the child, the desire that he be loved and cared for and protected from harm. What you are begging for so earnestly may seem to you not merely useful, but necessary. Does not God know best?

Keep then praying. Keep up your Masses and Novenas and Rosaries, but when you pray for a temporal favour add, at least in your heart: “But if what I ask is not for the glory of God or for the good of my soul, please grant me what is most conducive to both alike.” There is, in sheerest truth, but one thing absolutely necessary and that is to do God’s Holy Will and thereby save our souls. What seems to you so necessary would perhaps bring with it pain, and sorrow, and sin. There are few people who do not live to thank God, to thank Him on their bended knees, because at times He has not granted their requests.

Trust in God.

God, indeed, fulfils Himself in many ways. He said He would hear persevering prayer and He keeps his promise. Often He gives us just what we ask. And when in His fatherly love He seems to refuse, it is only to grant our requests in a deeper, fuller, more wonderful way. We must trust Him now, for trust is shown, above all, when everything is dark. In this darkness, we grope for His hand and place ours in His in trust unlimited. We must trust Him now when savagery and hate and bloodshed and misery have drenched the world in pain after so much war; trust Him as we pray and pray again: “Dear merciful God grant us the peace for which we long. Prince of

Peace, grant us peace.” Trust him that if he delays to hear us, the delay is for our good and even for the world’s good, trust Him that out of all this wreck and confusion will come a mankind purified, uplifted, cleansed by this terrible suffering from the terrible modern sin that has corrupted the face of God’s fair earth, a mankind less reliant on the things that pass away, and more on Him without Whom all is failure.

Noblesse oblige.

A Catholic then is one who lives ever a childlike trust in his all-loving, all-wise and all-powerful Father, God.

He is also one who as a child of God realizes that he must live up to his calling, must strive with a holy ambition to safeguard God’s honour and God’s rights, and to advance His interests in this world. An adopted child, we said, is under an immense debt of gratitude for the generous love that has been lavished on him. The best way he can attempt to repay this debt is by endeavouring to rise to the noble ideals, the interests, the ambitions of his foster-parents. So too with us. With a new depth of meaning, a new urgency comes back again Christ’s command “Be ye perfect as also your Heavenly Father is perfect.” It is the ever-insistent call to holiness, a call not to “a select and privileged few,” not just to nuns and priests, but to every Catholic.

We are children of God, we are adopted sons and more than adopted sons, we are of the blood-royal of God. No paltry, servile following will do; it must be a following of *nobility*, of special loyalty. We speak of children when they are upright, well-mannered, respectful, considerate, as being a “credit to their parents”; if these children are so good and pleasing, how kind and good must their parents be. We Catholics must be a credit to our Heavenly Father; we must be such that, when others come to know us, they will be drawn to the Faith, to our Divine Lord, to our Heavenly Father.

Let us then bring into our lives a great joy and a holy ambition. Seeing our own weakness and sinfulness we must indeed fear and with fear and trembling work out our salvation. But let us not make fear the only motive in our lives. “We have received the spirit of sons,” We must keep God’s law, but let it be done out of love. Our religion is not just a matter of regulations, not a mere set of prohibitions, of “You shall nots.” It is much more than this. It is a vital force and a stirring call: “Come, realize your greatness, and live up to it. Live your life, your divine life, more fully, more intensely, more joyously in the light of the great thought ‘We are God’s children’.”

When the flesh would lure you to shameful pleasures, make this answer: I am a child of God; I am called to too high a destiny to make myself the slave of vile passions.

When the world entices you, answer thus: I am a child of God: it is beneath my honour to set value on a clod of this earth.

When the devil would offer you the high places of this world answer him: "*Begone Satan: cease to defile with your suggestions a child of God.*" (Saint Cyprian).

(Thanks to the Irish Messenger.)
