

The Signs of the State of Grace

4. The inclination to converse intimately with God, and to faithfully resume this conversation when it is interrupted. St. Thomas said, "Friendship inclines a man to wish to converse with his friend. The conversation of man with God is made through the contemplation of God, according to these words of St. Paul: 'Our conversation is in heaven.' (Phil. 3:20)" And as the Holy Ghost gives us the love of God, He also inclines us to contemplate Him.

St. Thomas also says (*Contra Gentiles*, IV, 22) that this intimate conversation with God is like the revelation of the most secret thoughts, in the sense that nothing in is hidden from the Lord and that He Himself recalls to us the portion of the Gospel that should illumine the duty of every moment. There, we have an effect of friendship, "for it in a way unites two hearts in one, and what we reveal to a true friend seems not to have been said outside of ourselves."

5. A fifth sign is to rejoice in God, fully consenting to His will even in adversity. Sometimes in the midst of dejection there is given us a pure and lofty joy which dissipates all sadness. And normally we rejoice so much the more in the Lord as we more perfectly fulfill His precepts, for by so doing we form increasingly, one sole heart with Him.

6. A sixth sign is found in the liberty of the children of God. St. Thomas writes in his commentary on the Epistle to

the Romans: "The children of God are led by the Holy Ghost, not like slaves, but like free creatures. The Holy Ghost, in fact, makes us act by inclining our free will to His will, for He gives us to love God and inclines us to act for love of Him and not through fear in a servile manner." That is why St. Paul tells us: "You have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear; but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father). For the Spirit Himself giveth testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God." (Rom. 8:15)

7. A seventh sign of the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the soul is that the person speaks of God out of the abundance of his heart. St. Thomas says "Preaching should spring from the plenitude of the contemplation of the mysteries of faith." Thus from Pentecost on, St. Peter and the apostles preached the mystery of the redemption; so too, St. Stephen, the first martyr, preached before being stoned. This is not the rehearsed and slick delivery of the TV evangelist, but a simple, unshowy speech which does not rely upon any dominance of conversation, but a patient waiting for the opportunity to speak of God and the things of God.

8. Lastly, a slowness to anger and a quickness to forgive should not be underestimated as signs of God's grace.

In his book *Meditations for Each Day*, Cardinal Bacci wrote that St. John Chrysostom called the Holy Eucharist a mystery which transports us to heaven. Before this can happen, however, it is necessary for us to approach Holy Communion with the necessary dispositions. These are:

1) A lively and active faith, which will enable us to recognize in the Host the person of Jesus Himself, full of goodness, mercy and love, eager to shower upon us all the treasures of His Heart.

2) Purity and freedom, not only from mortal sin, but also from any deliberate attachment to venial sin.

3) Deep humility, because Jesus loves the humble and holds the proud at a distance from Him. He wishes us to be like Him, in other words, meek and humble of heart.

Few find it difficult to determine if they have a lively and active faith, and few have trouble knowing about their humility. These just take some reflection and a meditation or two. But to determine if we are free from mortal sin is another thing altogether.

We know we must work out our salvation in fear and in trembling, as St. Paul said. And part of that fear and trembling is receiving Holy Communion in a state of grace. Can anyone know if they are in such a state? Can anyone know if they have the indwelling of the Holy Trinity at the depth of their souls? The answer is an unequivocal "No." But there are

signs that the Holy Trinity dwells in us, signs that we are in a state of grace.

These are outlined by St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, IV.21f, and also in the *Summa Theologica*, Ia IIae, q.112, a.5. I wish to address this point because it comes up often enough in the Sacrament of Confession, or even a casual, though deep conversation with believers. For those who do not believe, and do not care about such things, I wonder, what will become of them? What will they do at the Judgment? What could they do? God help them.

But for those who do believe, there are seven signs recognized by spiritual writers which indicate that a soul is in a state of grace.

1. The testimony of a good conscience, in the sense that the individual is not conscious of any mortal sin. This is the fundamental, and most important sign.

2. Joy in hearing the Word of God preached. It must be added that it is not just joy in hearing it preached, but putting it into practice. The faithful who willingly listen to their bishop, or their pastor or his assistants (provided there is fidelity to the Magisterium) have this sign.

3. The relish of divine wisdom, which leads one to read the Gospel privately, to seek in it the spirit under the letter, to nourish the soul with it, even when it deals with the mystery of the cross and with the cross he must bear every day.