

"This reflection appeared first in *The Church World*, the diocesan weekly of Maine."

[<<Hub](#)

© copyright 2004 by S. Margaret Dorgan, DCM

[part 1: WHAT IS GRACE?](#)

[part 2: ST. THÉRÈSE AND GRACE](#)

[part 3: MORE ABOUT GRACE](#)

[part 4: THE GRACE OF CONVERSION](#)

[part 5: UNCREATED GRACE](#)

## GRACE AND FREEDOM (Part 6)

Our Creator God called us forth out of nothingness. With the vivifying touch of the divine finger, we were brought into existence. And wonder of wonders, our personal humanity was endowed with freedom, an awesome responsibility. The creative hand, which keeps us in the ongoing flow of our existence, reaches to our natural self-determination at its very core and offers us the much more sublime freedom of grace. No violence is done to our liberty. The deeper freedom of grace embodies our most profound truth. Thus we become what we are meant to be in our fundamental reality.

St. Thérèse saw the truth about herself in her littleness and nothingness. In recognizing her nothingness, she was acknowledging the infinite distance between the boundlessness of God and the limitedness of any creature. She wrote to Celine, "Let us line up humbly among the imperfect. Let us esteem ourselves as little souls whom God must sustain at each moment. When God sees we are very much convinced of our nothingness, He extends His hand to us....Yes, it suffices to humble oneself, to bear with one's imperfections. Let us run to the last place...no one will come to dispute with us over it" (*Letter* 243, p 1122).

She knows the last place is last only from a human point of view. It is not last in God's eyes. God's love and grace reach to this last place with special efficacy because we do not block it by our self-importance. Thérèse's littleness is only in relation to the immensity of God. In comparison with the divine greatness, the creature dissolves into utter emptiness. Yet Thérèse knew very well she was much more than nothingness. The *much more*, however was all from God, all gift, all grace.

The vocabulary of earlier spiritual writers may give us words that are not wholly welcome today. We tend to emphasize that we are *something* and we aim at being even more so. St. Thérèse would agree wholeheartedly. Each one of us is truly *something*. (We may even be designated as "something else" when we startle others by unexpected behavior.)

But if we let ourselves be captivated by self-centeredness, egoism, absorption in ambition and pleasure, then we are chained to a nothingness apart from God. And sadly, we are no longer at home with God. The One Who lived within as a cherished guest is treated like a stranger who receives little or no attention. Instead, we listen to soliciting voices which appeal to our need for fulfillment, promising us that power, luxury, fame can relieve the basic ache of the vacuum within us. This is the enslavement that tries to stuff the human void with further emptiness.

Very different is the kind of nothingness Thérèse affirms. "What pleases God is that He sees me loving my littleness and my poverty, the blind hope that I have in

His mercy" (Letter 197, p 999). Her nothingness is a luminous space open to receive the tender inflowing of divine love. John of the Cross says, "The humble are those who hide in their own nothingness," but he adds that they know how to surrender themselves to God ( *Sayings of Light and Love* , #163, p. 97). In a letter to a Carmelite nun, he declares that "the poor in spirit are happier...because in all things they find freedom of heart" ( *Letter 16*, p. 751). He and Thérèse are not describing a vacant emptiness but one that is always receptive to the fullness God wants to give.

Servitude to sinful habits, to obsessions and addictions, creates an inner core of hollowness which echoes with our cries of "I want, I must have, I'll grab this at any cost to myself or others." With grace we leave this state of slavery to become free, to breathe with the breath of the Holy Spirit. Creatures no longer put handcuffs on us. "It was for liberty that Christ freed us" (Gal 5:1).

We see the mark of its Maker on everything created. We smell the fragrance left by the divine touch. Creatures become a further revelation of God's beauty. Grace opens our eyes to their truth. We are not seduced by the distortions that immoderate craving imposes.

Thérèse writes the following words as if they were spoken by Jesus: "I am not saying that one must separate oneself completely from creatures, despise their love, their kindness, but, on the contrary, one must accept them in order to please Me and to use them as so many steps, for to separate oneself from creatures would serve only one thing: to walk and go astray on the paths of this earth" ( *Letter 190*, p 961).

A God who is all love has fashioned a world that calls forth our love. And God has made us worthy of being loved. St. Augustine says in one simple sentence, addressing God: "Because You have loved me, You have made me lovable."

Grace releases us from bonds and increases our power to love and to find joy in creatures. And grace draws forth the affection of others to love us. When St. Thérèse asks us to ponder our nothingness, she sees it appealing to divine mercy to shape us so that each one may carry out the special design God has assigned our separate lives. "Thus says the Lord who made you, your help who formed you from the womb, Fear not...be not troubled....You are my witnesses"(Is 44:2,8).

Grace gives us true freedom in Jesus. **"If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (Jn 8:36).**

Sister Margaret Dorgan,DCM