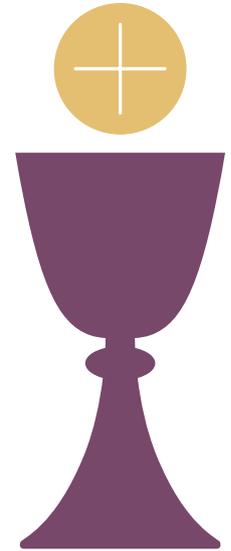


The Good Life

Ah, the good life... cocktails on the beach, leisure time, beautiful women, heroic men, fast cars, adventure, plenty of money, good health ... These staples of Hollywood and advertising tell us something about the dreams and fantasies of people in our society.



Sure enough, everybody has ideas about what they'd like their life to be like in an ideal world. Pleasure, excitement, success, and abundance figure in many of those dreams. Often our fantasies are an escape from the hard realities of life. Somewhere—somewhere *else*—there's "the good life."

What Christianity has to offer us, however, is far different from the elusive dreams of affluence and satisfaction that keep the wheels of commerce turning. It is the good life right here and now, wherever we are. The good life can exist in the midst of sorrow or pain, grief or poverty, because the good life is not about having good things. It's about being good.

CHOOSING THE GOOD

Virtue is described in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as "an habitual and firm disposition to do the good" (CCC 1803). The four cardinal virtues—prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance—are called natural virtues because they are basic to human life. They are a strong component of the Christian tradition for living a good life.

Living a good life also means practicing the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love. These are called "theological" because they direct our hearts to God and because God is the fulfillment of them.

Virtue is cultivated through practice. It is something that grows over time. Virtue shapes who we are. And it can happen anywhere, under any circumstances.

SHAPING A LIFE

Our circumstances in life, for the most part, are given to us. Indeed, many things about our life are givens. We are born into a particular family, at a particular time in history. Our race, language, and culture are given to us. We inherit characteristics from our parents. A religious heritage and identity may have been given to us, too.

But that is never the whole story. What we become—our life—is a work of human freedom under grace. It is the dynamic interaction of those givens with our character, our choices, our dreams, and God's plan for us. To live a life that "holds together"—a good life, a virtuous life—is no small task. It is the work of a lifetime.

THE EUCHARISTIC WAY

How does the Eucharist enable us to live a good life? Pope Benedict XVI, in writing about the Eucharist, reminds us, "It is not the eucharistic food that is changed into us, but rather we who are mysteriously transformed by it" (*The Sacrament of Charity*, 70). In this, he reaffirmed the teaching of St. Augustine, who saw clearly that the Eucharist effects

the transformation of the faithful into the Body of Christ. “Christianity’s new worship,” Pope Benedict goes on to explain, “includes and transfigures every aspect of life” (*The Sacrament of Charity*, 71). To live as Christ is the outcome of the Eucharist.

When we partake of the Eucharist, something happens to us. But what is it? Do we receive Christ, and take him into ourselves? Or does our reception of the Lord in Holy Communion result in *our being taken into him*? Clearly, as Pope Benedict has presented it, the latter is the case. We are taken into Christ. The Lord in the Eucharist is not accommodated to the form of our life, but rather our life begins to take on the form of his. We become more Christ-like, by the mysterious workings of grace in the Eucharist.

BECOMING CHRIST-LIKE

To become like Christ is to become bread for a hungry world—feeding people, teaching them, nourishing them. To become Christ-like is to become the wine of justice and peace, a potent and refreshing cup—speaking truth, acting with justice, promoting peace. Through continued participation in the Eucharist, and by living the Eucharist, we ourselves become the sacrament of love—a living sign.

Being transformed by the Eucharist means too that our lives are shaped by the Cross. One of the clearest signs that we are following in the footsteps of Christ, and conforming our life to his, is that we take up our cross. Self-denial motivated by love, and the acceptance of suffering for the sake of the Kingdom, are sure signs that we are living the Eucharist.

GROWTH IN HOLINESS

Another way to name this transformation is to say we grow in holiness. The whole Church is called to holiness, as the Second Vatican Council taught. Holiness is not the special preserve of a few exceptional people, such as saints or clergy or religious. Rather, it is the state to which all people are called.

A life of holiness includes worship, prayer, and devotion. Yet holiness is not some kind of other-worldly state. Our moral life, our firm disposition to seek the good in every situation, is essential to holiness. A life of virtue is an expression of holiness, of being close to God, who is all-good.

Of course, we cannot become holy by our own efforts. Rather, the sacraments make us holy, by sharing the life of God with us. The more we receive God’s grace, which is the activity of the Holy Spirit within us, the better we are able to imitate him. We become more just, more loving, and more forgiving. We grow more concerned for the poor and more devoted to God’s Kingdom. The Eucharist enables the transformation of our lives.

REFLECT

They say that a checkbook is a theological document. So is a calendar of our appointments. Think about how you spend money and time. What do your priorities, expressed in your checkbook and calendar, say about virtue? About holiness? About Eucharist?

ACT

Spend some time this week in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. Be open to whatever God may be calling you to be or to become, through the Eucharist.

PRAY

Holy God, thank you for giving me life. Thank you for my days and years, for the unfolding seasons and times you have given me. Thank you for the goodness of my life.

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