

LESSON 2

OUR CHOICE BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

BACKGROUND READING



The truth of who we are – human persons made in the image and likeness of God – is at the beginning of our study of our Life in Christ. We need to understand how God made us if we are to understand how we are to live the life that God has planned for us – which is to know, love, and serve Him on earth and be happy with Him forever in Heaven. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that “Endowed with ‘a spiritual and immortal’ soul, the human person is ‘the only creature on earth that God has willed for his own sake.’ From his conception he is destined for eternal beatitude” (CCC 1703). To understand what this means, we must look at the creation of the human person and what it means to be created in the image of God.

Made in His Image

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). To be created in the image of God does not mean that we look like Him. Rather, it means that human persons are created with intellect, free will, and the capacity to love. This means that we can:

- Use our reason to know things
- Choose between right and wrong
- Love God and one another

These gifts that we have received from God allow us to enter into communion with other persons and, by grace, to enter into a relationship with God Himself. Of all the creatures on earth, only human beings can share in the divine life of God.

Made with an Immortal Soul

The Church tells us that human beings are “the summit of God’s creation” (CCC 343). When God created Adam He “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7). This breath of God is the gift of God’s very own life given to human persons. It set them apart from all of the rest of creation. This immortal soul, the spiritual part of human beings, is how we are made in the image of God and shows us that the choices we make in this life have great importance.

Our immortal soul – sometimes referred to as our spirit – is like God because:

- It is immortal – it will live forever.

- It is where we know, freely choose, and love. These activities are unique to spiritual beings.

Only spiritual beings have souls that will live forever. This uniqueness in God's creation gives humankind a great dignity.

Humanity's Unique Place in Creation

At the beginning of creation, God made humanity in friendship with Him. The immortal souls of our first parents, Adam and Eve, were filled with God's divine life, which we call sanctifying grace. Sanctifying grace is the free and unearned life of God in our soul. It is a habitual state of blessedness, which means the life of God cannot be lost unless we choose to reject God (which Adam and Eve did through their disobedience, and which we do when we commit mortal sin). This sharing in the divine life is necessary if we want to live with God in Heaven.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and committed the original sin, Adam and Eve lost their friendship with God along with sanctifying grace. They also lost the harmony they possessed within themselves. Another way to describe this harmony is self-mastery: their intellect was in proper control of their passions and emotions. Because Adam and Eve were our first parents, we inherit their original sin, the sin committed at the origin of humankind. Now we also are born without the gift of sanctifying grace; we have lost the harmony of self-mastery; and we are inclined and attracted to sin.

But out of His great love for us, God sent His only Son to restore His friendship with us so that we can share in His blessedness in Heaven. Through His Passion, Death, and Resurrection, Jesus won our salvation and founded the Church on earth as a way of making His salvation accessible to all people for all time. But even though we once again share in God's divine life, our inclination to sin still remains. The great journey of our moral lives is to restore the harmony of self-mastery within our souls and reach the state of blessedness in Heaven.

Our Choice between Life and Death

And so we live in a dramatic tension. Being made in the image and likeness of God, each human being has free will and the ability to choose between God's will and self-will, between light and darkness, life and death. But now the choice is harder. Because our souls have been weakened by original sin, and because of our own personal sins, we are attracted by sin. The Gospel presents two paths to us: one path "leads to life"; the other "leads to destruction" (Mathew 7:13). It is all too easy for us to choose sin, the path to destruction, and hard for us to choose God's way, the path of life. But each human person was made for Heaven – to live forever with God in glory. Being made in God's image means that inside every one of us is the desire to do what is right and good. The fulfillment of our created nature is to live in the blessedness (beatitude) of God.