

SUNDAY CATECHISM / 20

The Subject of Charity

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Sunday Catechism



Today's lesson is dedicated to the **theological virtue of Charity**. In the previous article, we took note of the essence of Charity: today we shall treat the **Subject of Charity**.

What does the 'Subject of Charity' mean?

To speak of the Subject of Charity signifies responding to the question: where is the virtue of Charity infused? In which of mankind's faculties? This question, to be recalled, was previously considered with regards to **Faith** and **Hope**.

-We have observed that **Faith is inherent to the intellectual faculties of human beings, because it leads them towards adhering to the truth**: to the first Truth which is God, and to every truth whose origins are in God. On the other hand, we have noted that Faith's adhesion is propelled by the Will. Therefore, Faith regards mankind's intellect, but the act of Faith is also ordered by Will towards its object.

Hope, on the other hand, resides in the Will of Man, because it leads us to adhere to God in as much as He is clearly the Principle of Good. If the proper object of the intellect is the truth, the proper object of the Will is the Good. Therefore, Faith leads us to adhere to supernatural truths, and hence resides in the intellect, while Hope moves the Will to adhere to God, in as much as He is our Good and our beatitude. **Charity resides in the Will, for it leads us to adhere to God for Himself**, as Supreme Good. In Hope, one searches for God, as it is clearly for our own good (without any egoism). **In Charity, one tends towards God, as He is the Supreme Good.**

St Thomas Aquinas, in Question 24, which discusses the **Subject of Charity**, explains what has been illustrated above, in the first article: the question of **where Charity resides**. In the second article he asks **whether or not Charity is produced within us by infusion**, and in the third article **whether or not it is infused according to one's natural capacities**.

Let us synthesise St. Thomas's thoughts. Charity is not found in human beings according to their virtues or natural capacities.

Charity, or rather, this intimate friendship and communion with God, is found in human beings exclusively by the Will of God, and not because of their capacities, nor because of their Will. The principle of Charity is the Will of God; Charity is not to be understood, as often occurs, as something that humankind does, or as part of humankind's natural disposition: Charity within us is our participation in God who is Charity, and therefore it is an initiative of God's generosity and His magnanimity. It is God who loved us first: in the beginning, there was only God, not human beings. It is therefore God who takes the initiative of infusing Charity in human beings.

Human beings, however, are **not completely passive; there is a receptivity within them**, and St. Thomas explains into which part of humankind God instills Charity.

St. Thomas asks himself if amongst the viatores, that is, those individuals who are still on the path of mortal life, Charity may increase, or decrease or be completely lost (Articles 412).

St Thomas then responds that it is possible for Charity to increase not by addition- but in as much as it intensifies in the subject.

Article 5:

"Charity increases only by its subject partaking of charity more and more subject thereto. For this is the proper mode of increase in a form that is intensified, since the being of such a form consists wholly in its adhering to its subject"

St Thomas questions himself as to whether or not it is the acts of Charity which augment Charity itself within the person?

He responds that this is not the way it works; we mustn't imagine that each act of Charity increases Charity within us. Firstly, because Charity is infused into us by God, through the Holy Spirit: this signifies that it is God Himself who is responsible for our increase in Charity.

What effects do acts of Charity have upon humankind?

"They predispose man to an increase in Charity" : with these acts we may till, we may water, but it is God who makes Charity grow. In Article 9, St. Thomas presents **the three levels that Charity grows: Incipient, Proficient and Perfect.**

"(...) at first it is incumbent on man to occupy himself chiefly with avoiding sin and resisting his concupiscences, which move him in opposition to charity: this concerns beginners, in whom charity has to be fed or fostered lest it be destroyed: in the second place man's chief pursuit is to aim at progress in good, and this is the pursuit of the proficient, whose chief aim is to strengthen their charity by adding to it: while man's third pursuit is to aim chiefly at union with and enjoyment of God: this belongs to the perfect who "desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ."

In this increase in Charity, humankind is never sufficiently capable of loving God as Himself, that is, in the **measure which He deserves**. However, there is the possibility

of perfection of the subject who lives in Charity: it is the Celestial City, in which the heart of mankind rests in God, free from all that may detach them from the Lord. This, however is the perfection of the Blessed and not of the *viatores*.

In this terrestrial life, a **dual perfection** is possible:

the Perfection of **placing all of one's efforts into awaiting God and His things**, reducing as much as possible the time one spends waiting for all else.

The Perfection of placing one's heart in God, **in order that humankind may think of nothing contrary to God.**

- St. Thomas then asks whether it is possible for Charity to diminish or be lost entirely.

The increase in Charity is the work of God, and humankind may predispose themselves to this increase which is constantly supported by Grace. To say that Charity may decrease, signifies that God would desire it decrease, which cannot happen.

Humankind, however, may through sin distance itself from God; this detachment from God does not diminish their Charity: it removes it entirely. Every time there is an attachment to a created good which is contrary to the desired order of God, there is a sin which ruptures the Communion with God and therefore annuls Charity.

What about venial sin? It neither destroys nor diminishes Charity, but it predisposes humankind to its loss, because it predisposes to mortal sin.