



Mary leads us to Her Son,
Jesus, our Savior.
Icon: Cathedral of St. Joseph
La Crosse, WI

Sacred Scripture:

“Then God said:
‘Let us make man
in our image,
after our likeness.
God created man
in His image,
in the Divine image
He created him;
male and female
He created them.
(Genesis 1:26-27)



Stained glass window:
Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Marathon, WI.

Our Personal Dignity

Our dignity comes from God. In order to appreciate and defend this enormous gift, it is very important to examine the basis of our dignity.

In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve in His *image* and *likeness*. This is the foundation of their and our dignity. We are created by God and for God. We are created to be united with God. (CCC 27, 356-357, 1700)

Created in the image of God

Every person created by God as a unique individual has the basic dignity of being created in the image of God. The image of God refers to our ability to reason and choose. (CCC 306) God created us with an intellect to reason and a will to choose freely, giving us the ability to know and to love Him. This is part of our human nature. *Nature* is related to the Latin word *nativitas*, which means “birth.” By *human nature*, we are referring to those abilities with which we are born: to know and to love. In creation, God elevated man and woman above all other creatures by creating them in His image.

Our fundamental dignity

Since every person created by God has the basic dignity of being created in the image of God and is sacred, this dignity cannot be lost. (CCC 356-357) Therefore, every person deserves and is to be treated with complete **respect**.

Created in the likeness of God

The likeness of God refers to the Trinity dwelling within the soul of the person and the presence of Grace as well as the perfection of the human person in the life of Grace. (cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Ia, 93) God created Adam and Eve with sanctifying grace in their souls. Sanctifying grace is a participation in God’s Divine Life, through which Adam and Eve were united with God. Adam and Eve were like God because God’s likeness was in them, in other words, God’s Life or sanctifying grace was in their soul. From the first moment of their existence, Adam and Eve stood in the presence of God, as a son and daughter before their loving Father. Adam and Eve were endowed with the grace of Divine sonship. (See CCC 374-376)

Adam and Eve lost the likeness of God

Through Original Sin, Adam and Eve lost a participation in God’s Divine Life. They lost sanctifying grace in their soul and thus lost the likeness of God. (CCC 397-403) Adam and Eve lost the communion with God for which we were created, but God had a Divine plan to repair this damage from sin. (See CCC 734, 403-404, 415-420) Each person inherits the effects of Original Sin. This means that we are born without sanctifying grace in our soul. Therefore we lack the likeness of God.

The restoration of the likeness of God

Jesus saved us from sin and restored our union with God by His Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension. He opened the Gates of Heaven and

“Christian, recognize your dignity and, now that you share in God’s own nature, do not return to your former base condition by sinning. Remember Who is your Head of whose Body you are a member. Never forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of the Kingdom of God.”
St. Leo the Great
(CCC 1691)



Symbol of God the Holy Spirit, strengthening us with His grace

“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
2 Peter 3:18

“We are God’s children now; what we shall later be has not yet come to light. We know that when it comes to light we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”
(1 John 3: 2)

restored the flow of sanctifying grace by instituting the Sacraments. Sanctifying grace, a participation in God’s Life is received through the Sacraments. Sanctifying grace is first received at Baptism and thereby the person receives the likeness of God. (See CCC 405-406, 460, 654-655, 613-614).

Grace is related to the word *gratis*, which means “gift.” Sanctifying grace is God’s gift of a participation in His Divine Life that is given in addition to the abilities of our nature that we are born with. By nature, we are God’s creatures; by the Sacraments of rebirth, we become “children of God,” ‘partakers of the divine nature,’” which allows Christians “to see in the faith their new dignity and are called to lead henceforth a life worthy of the Gospel of Christ” (CCC 1692). The grace of the Holy Spirit received in the Sacraments strengthens us to live the Christian life.

It is important to note that through serious (mortal) sin, a person loses the life of sanctifying grace. A person who has lost sanctifying grace experiences spiritual blindness. The result is the lowering of the *perception* of their own dignity as well as of their neighbor’s dignity. (CCC 1487, 1861). This results in a person treating themselves as well as those around him without respect and love. Sin can be forgiven and sanctifying grace restored through the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Elevation of dignity through the Gifts received in Baptism

Human beings are not ‘children of God’ by their birth; they become children of God by Baptism where a person is re-born with new supernatural gifts. With the gifts of Faith, Hope and Charity, we are able to personally know God as He is in Himself, as well as love and serve Him by helping our neighbor in a sacrificial manner. (CCC 1265-1266)

Growth in dignity

Grace builds upon nature. Grace heals, elevates and perfects our human nature. There is a growth in dignity as there is growth in union with God in sanctifying grace. We grow in holiness in becoming more like God by cooperating with His grace received in the Sacraments and living a life of Faith, Hope and Charity. (CCC 1268-1270)

As Saint Leo points out in the quote, we have a distinctive dignity as Christians through living the Sacramental life. Note: This does not make one person better than another but rather the person growing in grace becomes the best he or she can be in becoming more “like” God.

Respect for every person

Every person has the basic dignity of being created in the image of God and therefore the dignity of the human person can never be lost. (CCC 356-357, 364) Further, God has provided the means for us to grow in His likeness through cooperation with grace received in the Sacraments. For these reasons, every person is to be treated as a child of God. Therefore, we must **respect** the sanctity of human life at all its stages, including the pre-born, the aged, the physically infirm, and the mentally impaired.

The perfect fulfillment of our union with God

Our dignity is perfected and fulfilled in Heaven in a “communion of life and love with the Trinity.” (CCC 1023-1024)