# **Jessica D. Maristela III MA Rel-Ed FIRE**

Kimberly Baker in her article “*Proclaiming a Dynamic Understandingof Grace: The Spiritual Foundation for Sacramental and Liturgical Catechesis*” seeks to explain the doctrine of grace and how it can “inform and renew liturgy, spirituality, and pastoral practice today”[[1]](#footnote-1) considering St. Augustine of Hippo’s view of grace. The author highlighted three important points in her article intended for the pastoral ministers, catechist and those involve in Catholic faith formation.

First, Kimberly Baker defined grace as she qouted Edward Schillebeeckx who said that grace is a “personal encounter with God”[[2]](#footnote-2) by which through the mediating grace, “the sacraments make this encounter with God possible. They make visible Christ’s saving action.”[[3]](#footnote-3) It is therefore through God’s grace that we experience the real presence of Christ in the liturgy, Sacraments, prayer and even in our daily living. Unfortunately, people, especially the young ones, show less awareness of how God is present and actively working in their lives.

And so, the author then proceed by discussing how grace is now slowly fading from the American mind-set. She presented how studies of American culture point toward an impoverished notion of grace both within Christian communities and culture at large including the young. The author shared an experience in a preaching conference happened in 2014 where after the interview with the speaker Christian Smith and his team, the result shows how the American teens and adult view God’s involvement in their lives. Some think of God as “waiting in the wings, available to help when needed, but for the most part leaving people to live life on their own.”[[4]](#footnote-4) If people have this mindset of God’s involvement in their lives, therefore, it is no wonder why they also have less appreciation of the sacraments and liturgy where God is most present. And for the same reason, their way of living becomes contrary to their life of worship. This means then that our acknowledgement of God’s presence in our lives affects not only our way of receiving the sacraments but also our way of daily living.

In spite of this impoverished understanding of grace, the author continued with a note of hope stating that the American teens and adult “do not reject the notion of a Creator God, nor do they question the reality of heaven.”[[5]](#footnote-5) But, the challenge it leaves to the educators of the faith “is not to convince them that there is God but rather to help them enter into the transforming encounter with God and the life of discipleship.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

However, the notion regarding grace of the American teens is not far different from my students’ idea which I can say is evident as they lead and say their prayers before the start of our class. But the additional challenge for me as a catechist is to have a deepened understanding of what grace is that I can explain it to my students in a way that my preaching through God’s grace will lead them to having a deepened and strengthened relationship with Him.

Second, Baker discussed about St. Augustine’s view of grace that can serve as a model for preaching and catechesis and will lead people to understand their story as part of the broader story of the saving acts of God. For Augustine, “grace acts.”[[7]](#footnote-7) Grace “precedes human merit. God initiates salvation and empowers any good acts a person may do.”[[8]](#footnote-8) This means that grace is the active presence of God in our lives that empowers us to do good, sustains our relationship with Him and moves us to live in harmony with others. This claim is actually supported by the CFC stating that, “Grace is primarily God’s loving PRESENCE,the gift of the Spirit within us that justifies and sanctifies us.”[[9]](#footnote-9) It is therefore the grace of God that makes us holy and live as faithful disciples of Christ.

As the author continued, she highlighted Augustine who speaks of a God “who takes action to come to us, to initiate the divine-human relationship, to lift any barrier that stands in the way.” This tells us that God takes the initiative and reaches out to humankind. I agree with this as it affirms what is stated in the CFC about revelation: “It is God’s reaching out to us in friendship, so we get to know and love Him.” [[10]](#footnote-10) This tells us that God first loved us. He is the first one to know us and revealed Himself to us that like in friendship, we may have a personal loving knowledge of Him that we may respond to His call to love and be united with Him. This outreach of God to humankind reaches its pinnacle In the incarnation which brings us the message that “it is God who came to us in Christ.”[[11]](#footnote-11) This statement was actually explained by Augustine using “a bridal imagery to express the depth of love and commitment of the incarnation.”[[12]](#footnote-12) The imagery shows how the bride-groom (Jesus) chose to stay with her bride (humanity)who fears that she cannot be loved by him because of her brokenness. But the bride-groom instead of running away from her, make a decisive intervention to enter into her brokenness and taking it as his own. “That is, Christ becomes human in order to restore the beauty of humanity by healing her from sin and bringing her into life with him.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

Jesus, who is the fullness of God’s revelation and through whom God’s unconditional and selfless love is felt, grounds our thinking in the shape of his life of “outreach to the poorest, to the least, in the pattern of mutuality in his relationships with men and women, in his inclusive hospitality and finally, in his suffering and death.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Therefore as Christians, we are all called to follow the footsteps of Jesus and be like Him in our way of living. As a catechist, we have to emphazised to our students that we must participate in this active work of God by doing charitable works to others especially the needy.

Third, the author with a very clear explanation, suggested “*naming grace*” “*daily mystagogy*” and “*narrative*” as ways for the educators of the faith and pastoral ministers on how they can give witness to the depth of God’s grace and offer sacramental vision of the Christian life in preaching and liturgical catechesis. As a catechist, I can say that all these are important to make catechesis more effective and relate-able for our audience. It is through human experiences, stories, contemporary examples, prayers and reflection that we can help our students see how God is actively working in their lives.

At the end, Kimberly Baker reminds all those who are involve in the formation of Christian faith that our role or mission in accompanying the young entrusted to our care to lead and help them have a deeper, stregthened and committed relationship with God is very important. But far more important also is our personal experience of God’s goodness and active presence in our lives that will radiate to people as we serve as a living witness of Christ saving and transforming works and words.

Grade 1.25

1. Kimberly Baker. “Proclaiming a Dynamic Understandingof Grace: The Spiritual Foundation for Sacramental and Liturgical Catechesis.” *Worship* 89/6 (November 2015): 506 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid.,510 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., 511. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 512. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., 513. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education (ECCCE), *National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines* 952 (Manila, 2007). Hereafter cited as **CFC** with paragraph number. Is this on CFC or NCDP? [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. CFC 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Kimberly Baker, “Proclaiming a Dynamic Understandingof Grace: The Spiritual Foundation for Sacramental and Liturgical Catechesis,” 514 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Anne Thurston. “The God Who Reaches Out.” 277 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)