

PRAY Holy Spirit, giver of life, you call us to become holy fire in our world—the Spirit of love and creativity that seeks to heal hate and build peace among us and the people of our world. Amen.

3rd Sunday of Easter



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SPIRIT

Who Influences Me?



	Self	Peers	Media	Parents/ Guardians	Teacher/Coach/ other adult
Jeans I wear					
Shoes I wear					
Food I eat					
Books I read					
How I spend my money					
Music I listen to					
Television shows I watch					
Piercing my nose					
Getting a tattoo					
Joining extracurriculars					
Drinking at parties					
Shoplifting at the mall					
Homework I do or don't do					
Grades I work for					
Concerts I attend					
Communicating with family					
How often I volunteer					
How often I attend Mass					
Working to pay my way					
Accepting people of other races					
Voting Democrat, Republican, Green					
Protecting the environment					
Treating others with respect					



by Adven James

"I can swim," I insisted. "I just don't want to."

"Then why did you come up here, Chris?" my cousin Lester asked.

"I don't know," I said automatically. But I did know. Mom and Dad were working out the final stages of their separation. A little time up at Uncle Mike and Aunt Rita's cabin would be good for me, they told me.

"The cabin is supposed to be good for me," I said.

"Whatever," said Lester. "I'm going swimming. You do what you want, kid."

"Don't call me kid, Lester," I said to him.

"It's Les," he said, throwing his beach towel over his shoulder, laughing. Les was a junior in high school, but he didn't seem to mind hanging out with his 15-year-old cousin for the weekend.

That was me—the sophomore on the verge of growing up with parents on the verge of divorce. A month ago, just before summer vacation, my parents told me that I'd be living with one of them once school started in the fall. I suppose they wanted to give me time to say goodbye to my friends and have "one last summer" before everything changed for good.

I walked toward the lake, stopped at the top of the steps that led down to the shore, and sat down. I could see Les swimming beyond the raft, which was anchored 25 yards out. He waved.

I waved back and stared out at the water. Everything at home was about to change and seemed far away already. The lake wasn't going to change. The raft would keep on floating, the sunfish would keep on swimming under the dock, the wind blowing through the trees, the hammock rocking back and forth. Maybe that is what my parents meant about time at the cabin being good for me—sitting and seeing all the things that weren't changing.

I felt like the lake was where I belonged. Everything around me

back home was changing except me. My mom and dad separated two years before, and I admit I have gotten used to the idea of them being apart. But the divorce made separate official and forever.

"Hey kid." I heard Lester's voice from the bottom of the steps. I must have been spacing out; I hadn't noticed him swimming toward shore. He skipped every other step and, before I knew it, he was sitting next to me.

"You're missing out, man," he said, grabbing me around the shoulders and rocking me back and forth.

"Knock it off, Les. You're getting me all wet."

"You used to swim all the time when you were a kid," he said. "You were always the last one out of the water when you and your folks used to come up here."

I shrugged.

We sat in silence for a few minutes.

"You're thinking about your folks, aren't you?" he said.

"Not really," I lied.

"Yeah, man..." he started.

"Life's a big journey."

Then the silence again.

I heard a loon somewhere out in the water.

Les hit my knee, saying, "Wait here. I've got something for you." I barely noticed Les was gone; I was almost hypnotized by the lake. Les was right. I remembered I didn't want to come out of the water when I was a little kid. I realized that this was my first time at the cabin since my folks split up. It was strange that with everything changing, I felt like I wasn't. Why was the whole world back home moving on without asking me first?

Les materialized next to me, coming out of nowhere. "Here," he said, stretching out his arm to me.

I looked at him blankly. Dangling from his fist was a medal on a chain.

"Are you going to hypnotize me into going swimming?" I asked.

Les laughed.

"No," he said, "It's a Saint Christopher."

I shrugged.

"Dude, Christopher is your saint."

"They're all the same to me,"

I said. Our family is Catholic but we never really go to church or anything like that. The medal could have been Saint Spongebob for all I knew.

"Well, this saint is the saint of safe journeys," Les explained, sitting down next to me. "I've had it ever since I was a little kid. I want you to have it."

"Why?" I asked.

"You've been looking out at that lake a lot, Chris," he said, putting the medal and chain in my hand.

"I don't get it," I said.

"Go in as Chris, come out as Christopher," he said, patting me on the back. Lester got up and went back into the house. I held the medal in my hand, trying to figure out what on earth he meant.

For some reason I thought about my baptism. I mean I was just a baby when my parents decided to make me a Catholic—another situation in which I was a kid and being at the mercy of the world around me.

Suddenly I wanted to get in the water, and just stay in it the way I did when I was little. I

SUNDAY GOSPEL

Baptism of the Lord

His baptism shows who Jesus is.

NARRATOR: At that time Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John tried to prevent him with the protest—

JOHN THE BAPTIST: I should be baptized by you, yet you come to me.

JESUS: Allow this now, for it is fitting to fulfill all of God's demands.



NARRATOR: Then John consented. When Jesus was baptized, just as he came out of the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and resting upon him. A voice from the heavens said.

VOICE: This is my beloved Son. My favor rests on him.

Matthew 3.13-17

wanted to keep on swimming until one of my relatives had to swim out after me and drag me back to shore. I got up and walked down the stairs to the dock.

Images of my life back home began racing through my mind, spinning around me like some kind of tornado. This fall everything would be different. My parents apart forever. New school.



New friends. New everything.

I took off my shirt and kicked off my sandals. I turned my back to the lake and held my arms over my head, my mind a blur of changes and memories.

"Hang on Saint Christopher!" I yelled.

I let myself fall backwards. The water, cold and electric, engulfed me.

Instantly I pulled myself up for air—and in that first breath, I think I knew what Les meant. The changes back home were happening, and now, I was on a journey to change with them.

QUESTIONS

1 When have you wanted your life, your relationships, to stay the same? **2** When have your life and relationships changed dramatically? What is hard about change? How did you benefit? Who helped you? **3** What does swimming symbolize in the story? **4** Who is Chris? Who is Christopher? **5** Who does Jesus' baptism show that he is? **6** What does the dove symbolize? **7** What does the voice affirm?

to
CHRISTOPHER



Grace is where God is.

by Sara Schulte

In the story, talking with his older cousin transforms Chris. Lester prods Chris to stop sitting on shore and wishing his life would stand still. The gift of the medal prompts Chris to dive in and swim in his evolving life.

What happens to Chris is grace, the free gift of his cousin's caring about him.

What is grace? The word means *gift, favor*. Jesus' mother Mary is full of grace. Grace is where God is—in creation, in Jesus, in celebrating the sacraments that continue Jesus' actions among us, in friends in whom we encounter our selves, in family members, in teachers, in failures that challenge us, in poverty that calls us to work for justice.

Grace is a special dimension in what we see as ordinary. A dancer moves *gracefully*. A host welcomes us *graciously*. A meal appears ordinary (we eat two or three every day), yet every time we sit down with family or friends we share food and our lives with those closest to us. We say *grace* to acknowledge that the food we eat and the people at the table come from God. We say aloud together, "Thank you, God, for the gifts of food and each other."

Grace refers to the continual presence of God in every moment of every day.

We have done nothing to deserve God's friendship, just as we have done nothing to deserve our parents' love. God's love is like a mother or a father's unconditional love, but God is not exactly like any mother or father we have ever known. We live in a relationship deeper than we can see.

God is always present, not just when we catch on God is there. God's love continually exists around us, in us,

through us. We live in God's free gift of life and Jesus' free gift of love for us. We live in sanctifying grace, the theological name for the gift of the Holy Spirit's presence in us, urging us to live the gospel in our world, helping us become like Jesus.

Grace is like the caffeine in my 20 oz. Mountain Dew. Sometimes I forget it coursing through my body, helping my effectiveness when I'm studying or working. Sometimes I notice it clearly, like when I'm trying to go to sleep right after pumping my body full of caffeine.

Caffeine permeates my Mountain Dew just as God's presence permeates existence. It is impossible to distinguish



where God ends and creation begins. The Holy Spirit coexists with our spirits. Grace and caffeine exist whether I notice them or not. But occasionally I get a jolt of recognition.

God's presence exists in creation for no extra charge, not because we are worthy or deserving, but because God's essence is to love and create. We live in grace like a fish swims in water.

The Spirit fills Jesus at his baptism, impelling him into his mission. In baptism and confirmation the Spirit fills each Christian,



Grace is favor, the free and undeserved help God gives us to respond to the call to become God's adopted children.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #1996

enlivening us just as our breaths do, attracting us to make friends, make peace, live in communion. In every eucharist we remember Jesus' pouring out his life in love for us and rising to new life—his gift to us still.

Grace is the word for the gift of God's life and love. Grace is the gift of the Holy Spirit within us, freeing us from sin and urging us to love God and each other. The Spirit unites us by faith and baptism in Jesus' death and resurrection. All is grace and invites us to respond to God's love with our love.

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Describe to a partner a moment of grace you have experienced—an experience of awesomeness in nature, of delight in a person, of becoming more whole, of finding friendship in an unusual person, of celebrating a sacrament meaningfully.
- 2 Create and celebrate a prayer service about how people can fit together in God.