



Years ago, I read a book by a woman named Martha Manning *called Chasing Grace*. Amazon described the book this way: *The eldest child of a devout Irish-American Catholic family, Martha Manning weaves her story around the seven holy sacraments: baptism, penance, communion, confirmation, holy orders, marriage and last*

*rites. She recalls her childhood pratfalls, adolescent yearnings and entrance into motherhood with wisdom, wit and remarkable honest. One of my favorite stories that Manning writes was about a night that she, her mother, and two elderly nuns had gone to dinner and a show in Washington, DC. By the time the show ends, it has gotten rather late. As they drive home, they soon find them hopelessly lost in some very dangerous parts of our nation's capital. The two nuns are in the backseat chatting and laughing about the wonderful evening they had just shared. They are completely oblivious to any danger they may be in. In the front seats, Martha and her Mother are getting more and more frightened. These are the days before cell phones and GPS's. Finally, Martha can't take it anymore and she turns to the two Sisters and says, *be quiet, don't you realize we could be killed at any moment?* One of the nuns, says, *don't worry dear. We are all in the state of grace.* The author goes on to say that she and her mother often told this story and ended with the words, *can you believe those nuns?* And the other would respond, *No, but I wish I had that much faith.**

In our Gospel today, Jesus is speaking to his apostles about his leaving them to return to the Father. We just marked The Feast of the Ascension this past Thursday. It is clear that Jesus has a deep and profound love for these men. I have always loved the farewell scene in the musical *Godspell* where Jesus is saying farewell to his disciples. It is a very emotional scene, and one that captures the love and sadness that both the Lord and the apostles are experiencing. He promises to send the Holy Spirit to them. The Gospel speaks these words to them and to us: *Righteous Father, the world also does not know you, but I know you, and they know that you sent me. I made known to them your name and I will*

make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them." Our Lord uses the words *the world* several times in the Gospel. What does Jesus mean by *the world* and why is he so concerned about its impact on his followers. Is Jesus renouncing the world as an evil place, reality from which we need to isolate and protect ourselves? The traditional phrase *the world, the flesh and devil* captures the power of temptation and what might turn a follower from God. To be called *worldly* is not a compliment in terms of Christian values. Yet, God chose to take become fully human and enter into our world. He lived all that was human except sin. He turned water into wine so a party could continue. He attended festive dinners and delighted in children, the lilies of the fields and fields of purple flowers. He has friends in whom he delighted. There has been a long history, and not without wisdom, of fearing the power of the society and culture that could lead a believer away from the Lord. Many saints chose to withdraw from the world around them. Some of the earliest followers of Jesus chose to go in the desert to withdraw from temptation. Still, Vatican II gives another long held tradition of the Catholic faith, as it speaks about how much wonder and goodness are in creation and in people who may not be followers of Christ. Many of us loved the image of Saint John Paul II when he would get off of a plane in a country that he had never visited. He would kiss the ground since it was holy to him.

Many secular people, as well as others who are not followers of Jesus or those who have no faith beliefs, are doing wonders around us. They are feeding the poor, working to protect the environment, seeking to build peace, fight disease and sickness, care for the abandoned. I believe, whether they know it or not, that they are doing such great deeds by the grace of God. I think of some of the great movies I have seen, television shows that have inspired me, music that has moved my heart, books that have made me see new realities, and creativity that amazes me. I see the hand of God in such activities of our world.

Yet, we are not naïve about the modern world. There are very strong and seductive currents that are not in line with the Gospel: to state a few: the hostility toward life in the womb, and the considerations of euthanasia, the easiness which our world turns to war, bigotry and racism, misuse of the wonderful gift of marriage and sexuality, greed, pride, rampant selfishness,

hostility toward people of faith. How easy it is to say everybody else is doing it. It's not my problem. This is *the world* that Jesus warns and worries about leading to great harm to the believers.

The challenges for people of faith is to discern what is best in the world around us and embrace it; and to turn away from that which is sinful and ugly in the plan of God. A question that a follower of Jesus must ask himself/herself regularly is: **Is the world changing me or am I changing the world.**