

Capital of Grace

In the shrine, you have probably seen a large jar in front of the altar and some small slips of paper that say: *capital of grace*. Do you know the meaning of this term?

Usually, we tend to write down our petitions, worries, and concerns on the little sheets, and then place them into the jar. This physical action strengthens our hope. It is as real as a conversation. We truly believe our Blessed Mother listens to our plea. Sometimes you simply find yourself writing down the names of your loved ones or just a word that means a world to you.

Have you ever pondered on the thought that God has given Mary intercessory power? Yes, she can gather our human experience and present it to God. Whatever the case may be, it's not hard to imagine that there must be a *special place* in this homey little chapel where the Blessed Mother gathers all our human experience and somehow presents it to God. In turn, she can, so to say, take the divine flow of God's life, his graces and blessings and give all of that back to us? This mutual exchange of gifts – when we offer our petitions and she brings us God's blessing – is the hallmark of our Schoenstatt Shrines. It is also the secret behind the *capital of grace*.

The Term, Word for Word

In the myriad ways that God is present to us in this world, we are certain with our founder, Father Joseph Kentenich, that God has also come to dwell among us in and through the shrine, but not without our cooperation. The term capital of grace was first coined in Schoenstatt during the founding period. We find a first written record of this in 1915. However, when Father Kentenich edited the Founding Document in 1919 for publication, he added the term to the last part of this document. As further evidence of his conviction, he explained it in their little newsletter in 1919: “On October 18, 1914, we came together in the little chapel for our first meeting. On this occasion a plan for the capital of grace was drawn up.” [Father Kentenich as quoted by Father J. Niehaus in *New Vision and Life*.]

In order to express their commitment to the Blessed Mother when they asked her to descend into the little sodality chapel, they pledged their prayers and sacrifices as their daily contributions to the capital of grace. They took these dynamics of this exchange seriously.

This sanctification I demand of you. ... Diligently bring me contributions to the capital of grace. By fulfilling your duties faithfully and conscientiously and through an ardent life of prayer, earn many merits and place them at my disposal. Then it will please me to dwell in your midst and dispense gifts and graces in abundance. [Father Kentenich, First Founding Document, 12]

Let us take a look at each of these words separately: capital and grace.

Capital

We all know that the word capital stands for a wealth or reservoir of riches used to produce more of both. It is a treasury that guarantees greater earnings by keeping it flowing: by investing and depositing. That is precisely what the expression capital of grace refers to but in the sense of graces and blessings. The to and fro movement, so to say, of prayers and sacrifices which the people and the Blessed Mother engage in by means of daily gifts of love is what God turns into increased blessings. We offer contributions to the capital of grace for our intentions, for those who visit the shrine, and for many others who benefit from them.

Grace

The life of God in our souls is kept vibrant through our participation in the Church's life and action. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches:

Grace is a *participation in the life of God*. It introduces us into the intimacy of Trinitarian life: by Baptism the Christian participates in the grace of Christ... § 1997 The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God make to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. ... § 1999

Through the sacraments, for example, we receive sanctifying grace. There are other sources of grace such as works of mercy, prayer, and sacrifice. A small deed offered to God in love can turn into a flood of grace. This is how we open new ways for the free gift of God's life within us. However, the effect and power of grace depends on how we *prepare* ourselves to receive it and how we *cooperate* with it. Father Ken-tenich called our contributions to the capital of grace, "opportunities to exercise a powerful influence over the destiny, government, and redemption of the world" (J.K. 1919).

Hence, the mystery of the capital of grace is found in this active, spiritual cooperation in the work of saving souls, our cooperation in allowing God's presence to be effective, and our cooperation with the plan of redemption.

Contributions to the Capital of Grace

We can speak of voluntary or involuntary contributions to the capital of grace.

We learn to identify the deed or prayer that we want to offer to the MTA for the needs of those for whom we pray. Sometimes such deeds are related to work, to housekeeping issues, to health, or to daily routine. Accepting the circumstances of everyday life with its demands, trials, and joys can also become such contributions. We can also offer to our MTA our struggles with loved ones, with friends, and those we relate to. Ordinary events can bring countless opportunities.

The Secret Behind the Capital of Grace

The secret behind this powerful tool of spiritual life is *love*. The love with which we offer our sufferings, our prayers and sacrifices, our joys, tasks, or achievements, will make our lives fruitful. That is, our lives will become sources of blessings for others.

It is a stream of love and of graces. Love endlessly flowing into our hearts, invites us to take part in its endlessness. The love of God and our MTA fills our hearts with their presence as soon as we come into the shrine. We, in turn, bring our offerings with childlike love and devotion. Every time we place a contribution into the capital of grace it is an encounter with God, it is a way of uplifting the most common or even bothersome things of everyday life. Just as love gives meaning to hardships, the capital of grace does, too.

A mutual exchange takes place: a total donation of self in little things. We show our love for God through our small deeds, daily prayers, and faithful fulfillment of our duties. God in return showers his love on us through the same insignificant events. God's most tangible proof of his love for us is the presence of the MTA in her shrine.

Some Practical Suggestions for Contributions to the Capital of Grace

- Consciously offer to the capital of grace a particular task that belongs to the daily routine, something that I *have to* do anyway
- Rejoice over a blessing that you or someone else has received and offer that consciously to the capital of grace
- Offer a pain, a sorrow or sadness
- Carry with your children's concerns in a loving way
- To serve right away upon request—not letting the other wait
- Accept a humiliation with love
- Renounce watching a particular TV program
- Giving up connecting to a favorite internet site or media spot
- To wait a little bit before eating a favorite food
- Smile while being very tired
- If there is no time to pray a Rosary, offer a particular difficulty or disliked task
- Pray something that you seldom choose

Exercise

- Make a list of things that are normally difficult and unpleasant for you.
- How would you offer those to the MTA as contributions to the capital of grace?
- Make a list of the devotional practices that you think give greater glory and praise to God and the Blessed Mother.
- If once you could not pray those, what deeds would you replace them with?
- Look for ways to create an atmosphere of joy and kindness wherever you go. Does your list include patience while waiting in line at the checkout counter?
- Do you look at a stranger and see God's blessings and potential in all that diversity?
- Do you know what makes you irritable? Can you offer that up and struggle to overcome it for the sake of souls?
- And the list could become endless.

Words from Father Kentenich – On the Capital of Grace

Taken from the Second Founding Document
October 18, 1939

91. Reemphasize the importance of the contributions to the capital of grace of the Mother Thrice Admirable!
92. Everything which we have said thus far about the awareness of our divine mission and the Marian character of our family, finds its concrete expression and culmination in our contributions to the capital of grace of our Mother Thrice Admirable.

93. It is therefore understandable that they have been among the things which have been most questioned in the battles of the past years. This gave us abundant opportunity to reexamine their dogmatic foundation, psychological significance, and educational usefulness. The result was a more conscious retention and a more fervent support for this proven practice.

94. They [the contributions to the capital of grace] stand at the beginning of our family history, of every new Schoenstatt Shrine and every fruitful undertaking for Schoenstatt. In the course of the years they became an expression of our unreserved surrender to our Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt and her work; of an enlightened and effective union of our activity with that of God; of a supernatural faith in our mission and a profound Marian attitude. As a result, it became a measuring rod for the reliability and usefulness of the individual members of the family.

95. Through the blank check we give the contributions to the capital of grace of our Mother Thrice Admirable that high position once more in the whole family and in our own lives which they possessed in the efforts and striving of our Joseph Engling and which they, in accordance with God's plan, must always have.

96. Thanks be to God! So it is that we again place ourselves with both feet on the ground of our tradition, and carry one of the most essential fundamental forces of the living organism of our family with new vigor into a perilous future. We rejoice because we know and recognize the ancient law: *Omne regnum iisdem mediis continetur, quibus conditum est*—i.e. the prosperity of a kingdom is determined by the faithfulness of its members to the basic forces upon which it was originally founded. Our family was essentially built through the contributions to the capital of grace of the Mother Thrice Admirable. It must therefore be uncompromising in its faithfulness to this point for all times if it wants to survive the trial by fire. For the family and its fruitfulness it is a matter of life and death.

99. As a jubilee gift, may our Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt implore for all her children the correct understanding of the contributions to the capital of grace, of the Marian character of our family, and of its divine mission.