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## Graceful

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## Graceful

When we say that someone is graceful or acts gracefully, we intend to affirm and praise the positive qualities we observe. Our use of the word is usually graceful in itself, as though a kindly spirit were evoked within us, not only bringing the word to mind when appropriate to the behavior we perceive in others, but drawing us to participate in the goodness we identify. Though we may not have in mind a definition, rarely do we use the word "graceful" cynically or sarcastically. Perhaps, in the presence of gracefulness, we ourselves become more graceful in our thoughts and judgments.

A graceful person usually has more that is pleasing about him or her than can be recognized by mere sight. If we say "Gracefully done," we usually mean that someone acts without demanding attention, but is entirely deserving of notice by anyone who has a taste and appreciation for goodness. We generally associate gracefulness with gentleness rather than power. Gracefulness images for us God, who, possessing all power, does not force us, but gently inspires us to act in ways that more fully befit our humanity.

Rarely do we look for or find gracefulness in superficial words or actions. Whether or not a person who appears or acts gracefully intends the effects his or her way of proceeding has upon us, we notice an interior quality that implicitly touches upon a shared sense of spirituality: "It takes one to know one"

Graceful behavior appears natural, not self-conscious. But only through much conscious practice will someone, such as an Olympic ice-skater, become recognized as graceful. Though everyone is beautiful in the eyes of those who love them, the quality of gracefulness arises from deliberate choices that are in keeping with a person's gifts and personal vocation.

While we can, if we choose, find the presence and action of God among us at a football game or even in the midst of battle, we do not usually say of someone that their violent behavior is graceful, no matter how well executed. God is the creator of black holes that destroy even stars that are much larger than our sun, and all of creation is good, but we do not think of a hurricane as a graceful event. Just as we spontaneously identify graceful words and deeds in a person with the graciousness of God towards us, we do not so identify violent intentions or actions.

Mary, before she became the mother of Jesus, was called "full of grace," providing us with yet another opportunity for considering possible, even mysterious, meanings for "graceful." We never look for graceful behavior in

someone who is "full of self." We recognize a graceful person as having qualities that are directed, and flow, outward. A graceful person might be "filled with God" rather than self. Perhaps all of our associations of gracefulness include some level of transcendence that we are able to perceive through our interior senses, even while we observe with our physical senses.

Whether others might notice or not, we can choose to live more gracefully.