



**Articles on Catholic Theology and Teachings -
Part 6 -
Grace: A Precious Gift of God**



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For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God. --Ephesians 2:8

The Death and Resurrection of Christ

Christ's death and resurrection changed the world forever. No one can deny that the birth of Christianity, which rose with Jesus in the Resurrection, would lay the foundation for a new and changed world. Most Christians can find a seed of common ground in the belief that Jesus' death was a sacrificial one. His death was not one in vain, but one in which all human sins and offenses against God's love could be paid for by Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the world. The blood of our Savior redeemed the world and opened the gates of heaven so that humans could partake in justification of their sins.

Our God is supremely just and the essence of the purest good. The sins of evil, which permeated the human race, placed a chasm between our all-good and just Creator and us. God could not allow humanity, tainted in sin, to embrace him in his fullness in heaven. His infinite justice could not allow for sin to go unpunished. Yet his love for humanity was so great that he could not abandon his children to the hatred of Satan and an eternity of pain and suffering. God's mercy and continuous cries to his people, through the Jewish prophets, went largely unheeded. So God, in the second person of the Trinity, assumed the nature of man to teach his people and atone for the sins of man by the human death of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. This fundamental mystery was the highest act of love and beatitude to ever grace creation. Christ's willing, fleshly sacrifice paid for the collective guilt of humanity as Christ took on the sins of the human race for all time. He saved our souls and captured the hearts and lives of the first Christians and those who followed.

**THE ANSWERS YOU SEEK
NEVER COME WHEN THE
MIND IS BUSY, THEY COME
WHEN THE MIND IS STILL.**

wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned (John 15:6)." Thus a sin of mortal nature cuts us off from the Body of Christ, until the sinner is moved to repentance in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Can the witness of grace assure us of our salvation?

The Church has always understood grace as a gift that can only be known through faith. Grace is a supernatural gift that escapes our experience, and thus cannot be known by feelings or good works (Council of Trent: DS 1533-1534). No human can definitively know that they possess assured salvation, because it would mean that we have infallibility to judge our own souls, something that is reserved to God alone. Still, we can be assured by faith that grace will work through us to move us to acts of hope, love and charity for the glorification of Jesus Christ and his kingdom. Christ speaks of the loving aspect of grace and tells his disciples, "Thus you will know them by their fruits (Mt 7:20)" to testify that the grace of God would bear the fruit of charity in those who walk in the path of Jesus.

Conclusion

The redeeming nature of supernatural grace truly transforms the recipient into a new creature in Christ. As the supernatural life of the soul, grace is the most important treasure anyone could possibly be given. Thus those who fully understand the gift of grace can truly take to heart the ultimate sacrifice and love in Christ's passion and resurrection.

Grace

God's gift of salvation was one of pure love. He desired humanity to join him in heaven, but he could not force us to accept his gift of love. Upon creating humans, he endowed us with free will so that we could freely return his infinite love with love. Thus God could only attribute the salvation of Christ's passion (his crucifixion and resurrection) to those who freely returned his love in faith and hope.

Human experience shows that people often have a tendency to draw toward evil and selfish passions. This misplaced love for the things of our natural world is a result of the original sin of mankind and the continuing temptation of Satan. In order to help humanity choose God over selfishness and temporal happiness, the crucifixion of Jesus brought forth a new gift: the gift of grace.

Grace is the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call. The Church teaches us that grace moves us to participate in the life of God and moves us to begin and sustain a relationship with our Creator. Grace not only assists us in living the Christian life through purification of our hearts, it literally changes our souls by infusing divine life to heal the wounds of sin. Grace is wrought through the work of the Holy Spirit, and grace is what initially moves our hearts to conversion and repentance.

A baptism into grace

Sanctifying grace is the grace we receive in the sacrament of Baptism. Sanctifying grace, when infused in the soul, breathes supernatural life into the soul, heals it of sins and upon death allows us to enjoy the fullness of God's beatitude in heaven. Without sanctifying grace the soul is lifeless and a slave to sin. It is not possible for humans to merit the kingdom of heaven without the gift of sanctifying grace paid for by Christ's redemptive suffering, death, and resurrection.

St. Paul in his letter to the Romans asks "...are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life (Rom 6:3-4)." Thus Paul notes that baptism confers on us a newness of life which the Church teaches us is sanctifying grace.

This is why baptism is the vital first step in the life of a Christian. Jesus tells us in the gospel of John, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit (John 3:5)." Thus the cleansing waters of baptism wash away the inequities of sin and through the grace of God begin a sustaining relationship in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Christ reminds us that "whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. Whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mk 16:16)."

A second kind of grace—Actual graces

Although sanctifying grace instills us with life, there are moments in our lives in which we are especially moved by God's love. These graces help us to sustain our relationship with Christ and are called actual graces, because they reflect the intervention of God in our lives. Actual grace is what moves a person's heart to conversion and penitence and sustains the soul in the process of justification and sanctification.

The seven sacraments of the Church are also a work of actual grace to nourish the Body of Christ and its members. The Eucharist, as the central sacrament, provides the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ as the heavenly food for the soul. Christ promises the sustaining life of grace in the Eucharist to his apostles, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; Whoever eats this bread will live forever...(John 6:51)."

Special gifts of the Holy Spirit

The grace of the Spirit can also endow us with spiritual gifts called charisms. St. Paul tells us that these gifts take many forms such as ministry, a teacher of doctrine, prophecy, service, and zeal. Sometimes the gifts are extraordinary and miraculous, such as the gift of miracles or speaking in tongues. It is important to realize however that these gifts are meant not for the glorification of the recipient, but for the common good and service of the Church. The extraordinary gifts of tongues, miracles, interpreter of tongues and healing are not granted to all the members of the Church, but to certain individuals as decided on by the Holy Spirit. Such gifts are ordered to strengthening the faith of the Church and are oriented towards sanctifying grace.

Is it possible to cut ourselves off from Christ, and lose the sustaining gift of grace?

The Catechism of the church tells us "sins are rightly evaluated according to their gravity (CCC 1854)" and that there is a distinction between sins, that of mortal and venial sin. "Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God's law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him (CCC 1855)." Venial sin is a sin of less serious matter that weakens charity and impedes the exercise of virtue. The bible testifies to the differentiation between mortal and venial sin. St. John's epistle tell us "there is such thing as deadly sin, about which I do not say that you should pray (1 Jn 5:16)". The Tradition of the Church affirms that mortal sin destroys sanctifying grace of the soul and cuts the sinner off from the body of Christ. Scripture again affirms Tradition when Jesus compares the Body of Christ, the church, to a vine. The members of the Church are warned by Christ, "Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and