

AMAZING GRACE

by Jerry Johnson

" For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God;..." (Eph 2:8).

So what exactly is this grace that saves us? Where does it come from and how do we acquire it? Both scripture and the catechism give us very full and varied answers to these questions. Paragraph 1996 of the catechism explains that grace is the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to be his children and partake in his divine nature. Par. 1997 simply states that grace is a participation in the very life of God. Paragraph 2018 tells us that grace moves us toward God and away from sin. We can see from these statements that there are different facets to this very important gift called "grace".

Paragraph 1999 gives us a beautiful summary of these different facets: "The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. It is the sanctifying or deifying grace received in Baptism. It is in us the source of the work of sanctification." First of all, it is a gift, free and underserved, as par. 1996 stated. It is the gift of God's own life, which, once it is infused into our soul, changes us. It sanctifies us, transforms us and gives us strength to live a life of faith.

This life of grace begins with

God himself. It doesn't initially come from our own efforts. It is grace that enables us to be open to God in the first place; to be properly disposed to receive him. He draws us to himself. At our baptism he then pours into our souls the gift of sanctifying grace. This is the "...disposition to live and act according to God's call". (CCC 2000) We are all called to be holy; it is our primary vocation in life. This holiness can only be attained by the power of God's grace working in our lives. It is God's power within us to become more like Christ. As with any gift, however, we have the option of using it or rejecting it. The rejection of this gift of grace will lead us to sin and persistent sin will then lead to spiritual death. Notice that paragraph 1996 described above speaks of grace as God's help. This implies that we need to take action, which will benefit from his help. We are called to cooperate with this God given grace, to use it to live as his children who share in his very nature. This is our call to holiness, which ultimately leads us to that heavenly existence of eternal life in Christ.

This gift of God's grace doesn't end at our baptism.

Throughout our lives his grace is poured out on us at different times and in varied forms. The initial grace of forgiveness and justification is dependent on God alone, not on our work. Beyond that, however, we can merit graces for ourselves and others through our prayer and

other meritorious actions. The sacraments themselves are very deep sources of grace for us as Catholics, but the fruit, or effect of that grace on our lives, can also depend on our disposition to receive a particular sacrament. For instance, to receive the Eucharist and the fruit of the grace that flows from that powerful Sacrament, we must be free from grave sin and have a proper attitude in receiving the Sacrament. We must, as Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, discern the body and receive worthily. We must continually strive for this attitude to truly benefit from sacramental grace.

All of our actions, if inspired and transformed by God's grace, will be for the sole purpose of expressing our love for God and a desire for him rather than a selfish desire for our own merit. (see St. Therese, pg 2) When we can examine our motives and begin to sense this purification of our heart, we can truly know that God's grace is alive in us. That amazing grace that allows us to share in our Father's divine nature now and for eternity. This is our purpose, the reason for our existence, and the heavenly beatitude that we will fully experience beyond our life on this earth. It is all grace, thanks be to God!

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The Catechism of the Catholic Church

"The first work of the grace of the Holy Spirit is conversion, effecting justification in accordance with Jesus' proclamation at the beginning of the Gospel: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Moved by grace, man turns toward God and away from sin, thus accepting forgiveness and righteousness from on high.

"Justification is not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man." (CCC 1989)

"The divine initiative in the work of grace precedes, prepares, and elicits the free response of man. Grace responds to

the deepest yearnings of human freedom, calls freedom to cooperate with it, and perfects freedom." (CCC 2022)

"Sanctifying grace makes us "pleasing to God." Charisms, special graces of the Holy Spirit, are oriented to sanctifying grace and are intended for the common good of the Church. God also acts through many actual graces, to be distinguished from habitual grace which is permanent in us. (CCC 2025)

"Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, no one can merit the

initial grace of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life." (CCC 2010)

"The New Law is the grace of the Holy Spirit received by faith in Christ, operating through charity. It finds expression above all in the Lord's Sermon on the Mount and uses the sacraments to communicate grace to us." (CCC 1983)

THOUGHTFUL QUESTIONS

1. Do you recognize the grace of God in your life?
2. Are you cooperating with God's grace to grow in holiness?
3. Do you seek the gift of God's grace for yourself and others through prayer, sacrament and meritorious works?
4. What is your motive for asking for God's grace?

The Saints

"Asked if she knew that she was in God's grace, she replied: If I am not, may it please God to put me in it; if I am, may it please God to keep me there." (*St. Joan of Arc*)

After earth's exile, I hope to go and enjoy you in the fatherland, but I do not want to lay up merits for heaven. I want to work for your love alone. . . . In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you with empty hands, for I do not ask you, Lord, to count my works. All our justice is blemished in your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in your own justice and to receive from your love the eternal possession of yourself. (*St. Therese of Lisieux*)

"In a state of grace the soul is like a well of limpid water, from which flow only streams of clearest crystal. Its works are pleasing both to God and man, rising from the River of Life, beside which it is rooted like a tree. Otherwise it would produce neither leaves nor fruit, for the waters of grace nourish it, keep it from withering from drought, and cause it to bring forth good fruit." (*St. Teresa of Avila*)

Sacred Scripture

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access (by faith) to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God." (Rom 5:1,2)

"So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help." (Heb 4:16)

"...not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life." (Titus 3:5-7)

"Moreover, God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work." (2 Cor 9:8)

"From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." (John 1:16,17)