



GOD'S SALVATION: LAW AND GRACE

3. Justification and Grace

Texts from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

JUSTIFICATION

What is justification?

The grace of the Holy Spirit has the power to justify us, that is, to cleanse us from our sins and to communicate to us “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ” and through Baptism (Rom 3:22):

“But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves as dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (Rom 6:8-11) (1987)

Dying to sin and being born to new life

Through the power of the Holy Spirit we take part in Christ's Passion by dying to sin, and in his Resurrection by being born to a new life; we are members of his Body which is the Church, branches grafted onto the vine which is himself (Cf. 1 Cor 12; Jn 15:1-4): “[God] gave himself to us through his Spirit. By the participation of the Spirit, we become communicants in the divine nature... For this reason, those in whom the Spirit dwells are divinised.” (St. Athanasius) (1988)

Conversion

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” (Mt 4:17). 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.” (Council of Trent) (1989)

Detaches us from sin

Justification *detaches man from sin* which contradicts the love of God, and purifies his heart of sin. Justification follows upon God's merciful initiative of offering forgiveness. It reconciles man with God. It frees from the enslavement to sin, and it heals. (1990)

Justification is at the same time the *acceptance of God's righteousness* through faith in Jesus Christ. Righteousness (or ‘justice’) here means the rectitude of divine love. With justification, faith, hope and charity are poured into our hearts, and obedience to the divine will is granted us. (1991)

Justification is merited by the Passion of Christ

Justification has been *merited for us by the Passion of Christ* who offered himself on the cross as a living victim, holy and pleasing to God, and whose blood has become the instrument of atonement for the sins of all men. Justification is conferred in Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy. Its purpose is the glory of God and of Christ, and the gift of eternal life:

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus.” (Rom 3:21-26) (1992)

Cooperation between God's grace and our freedom

Justification establishes *cooperation between God's grace and man's freedom*. On man's part it is expressed by the assent of faith to the Word of God, which invites him to conversion, and in the cooperation of charity with the prompting of the Holy Spirit who precedes and preserves his assent:

“When God touches man's heart through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, man himself is not inactive while receiving that inspiration, since he could reject it; and yet, without God's grace, he cannot by his own free will move himself toward justice in God's sight.” (Council of Trent) (1993)

The work of God's love

Justification is the *most excellent work of God's love* made manifest in Christ Jesus and granted by the Holy Spirit. It is the opinion of St. Augustine that “the justification of the wicked is a greater work than the creation of heaven and earth”, because “heaven and earth will pass away but the salvation and justification of the elect... will not pass away”. He holds also that the justification of sinners surpasses the creation of the angels in justice, in that it bears witness to a greater mercy. (1994)

Sanctification of the whole being

The Holy Spirit is the master of the interior life. By giving birth to the ‘inner man’, justification entails the *sanctification* of his whole being:

“Just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now yield your members to righteousness for sanctification... But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life.” (Rom 6:19, 22) (1995)

GRACE

God's favour and his free and undeserved help

Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is *favour*, the *free and undeserved help* that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life. (Cf. Jn 1:12-18; 17:3; Rom 8:14-17; 2 Pt 1:3-4) (1996)

Participation in the life of God

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, the Head of his Body. As an “adopted son” he can henceforth call God “Father”, in union with the only Son. He receives the life of the Spirit who breathes charity into him and who forms the Church.

Grace is supernatural

This vocation to eternal life is *supernatural*. It depends entirely on God's gratuitous initiative, for he alone can reveal and give himself. It surpasses the power of human intellect and will, as that of every other creature. (Cf. 1 Cor 2:7-9) (1997-8)

Grace received in Baptism is sanctifying and deifying

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 (Cf. Jn 4:14; 7:38-39): "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself." (2 Cor 5:17-18) (1999)

Habitual grace and actual graces

Sanctifying grace is an habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love. *Habitual grace*, the permanent disposition to live and act in keeping with God's call, is distinguished from *actual graces* which refer to God's interventions, whether at the beginning of conversion or in the course of the work of sanctification. (2000)

The preparation of man is already a work of grace

The preparation of man for the reception of grace is already a work of grace. This latter is needed to arouse and sustain our collaboration in justification through faith, and in sanctification through charity. God brings to completion in us what he has begun, "since he who completes his work by cooperating with our will began by working so that we might will it" (St. Augustine): "Indeed we also work, but we are only collaborating with God who works, for his mercy has gone before us. It has gone before us so that we may be healed, and follows us so that once healed, we may be given life; it goes before us so that we may be called, and follows us so that we may be glorified; it goes before us so that we may live devoutly, and follows us so that we may always live with God: for without him we can do nothing." (St. Augustine) (2001)

Man's free response

God's free initiative demands *man's free response*, for God has created man in his image by conferring on him, along with freedom, the power to know him and love him. The soul only enters freely into the communion of love. God immediately touches and directly moves the heart of man. He has placed in man a longing for truth and goodness that only he can satisfy. The promises of "eternal life" respond, beyond all hope, to this desire: "If at the end of your very good works..., you rested on the seventh day, it was to foretell by the voice of your book that at the end of our works, which are indeed "very good" since you have given them to us, we shall also rest in you on the sabbath of eternal life." (St. Augustine) (2002)

The gift of the Spirit: sacramental graces, special graces, charisms

Grace is first and foremost the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us. But grace also includes the gifts that the Spirit grants us to associate us with his work, to enable us to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth of the Body of Christ, the Church. There are *sacramental graces*, gifts proper to the different sacraments. There are furthermore *special graces*, also called *charisms* after the Greek term used by St. Paul and meaning "favour", "gratuitous gift", "benefit". Whatever their character - sometimes it is extraordinary, such as the gift of miracles or of tongues - charisms are oriented toward sanctifying grace and are intended for the common good of the Church. They are at the service of charity which builds up the Church. (2003)

Graces of state

Among the special graces ought to be mentioned the *graces of state* that accompany the exercise of the responsibilities of the Christian life and of the ministries within the Church:

"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness." (Rom 12:6-8) (2004)

Grace and experience

Since it belongs to the supernatural order, grace *escapes our experience* and cannot be known except by faith. We cannot therefore rely on our feelings or our works to conclude that we are justified and saved. However, according to the Lord's words - "Thus you will know them by their fruits" (Mt 7:20) - reflection on God's blessings in our life and in the lives of the saints offers us a guarantee that grace is at work in us and spurs us on to an ever greater faith and an attitude of trustful poverty.

A pleasing illustration of this attitude is found in the reply of St. Joan of Arc to a question posed as a trap by her ecclesiastical judges: "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". (Acts of the trial of St. Joan of Arc) (2005)

IN BRIEF

- **The grace of the Holy Spirit confers upon us the righteousness of God. Uniting us by faith and Baptism to the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, the Spirit makes us sharers in his life. (2017)**
- **Like conversion, justification has two aspects. Moved by grace, man turns toward God and away from sin, and so accepts forgiveness and righteousness from on high. (2018)**
- **Justification includes the remission of sins, sanctification and the renewal of the inner man. (2019)**
- **Justification has been merited for us by the Passion of Christ. It is granted us through Baptism. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who justifies us. It has for its goal the glory of God and of Christ, and the gift of eternal life. It is the most excellent work of God's mercy. (2020)**
- **Grace is the help God gives us to respond to our vocation of becoming his adopted sons. It introduces us into the intimacy of the Trinitarian life. (2021)**
- **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. (2022)**
- **Sanctifying grace is the gratuitous gift of his life that God makes to us; it is infused by the Holy Spirit into the soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. (2023)**
- **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. (2024)**