

SALVATION AND THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, good works are indeed necessary for salvation. However, it is important to understand the Catholic understanding of salvation and the role of good works within it.

Salvation is a gift from God's grace, which is freely given to us. This grace is received through faith and baptism, which initiates our relationship with God and incorporates us into the Body of Christ (the Church). Through this initial grace, we are justified, meaning that we are made right with God and our sins are forgiven.

However, this initial grace of justification must be lived out and continually nourished through a life of faith and good works. Good works are seen as the fruit and manifestation of the grace we have received. They are not merely external actions but flow from a transformed heart and a desire to love God and neighbor.

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.

In other words, while we cannot earn the initial grace of justification through our own efforts, once we have received this grace, we are called to respond in faith and love, cooperating with God's grace to grow in holiness. Our good works, done in union with Christ, become a means of cooperating with God's grace and growing in righteousness.

Furthermore, our final salvation is not solely dependent on our own efforts or good works. It is ultimately a gift from God, who desires the salvation of all people. Our good works, however, play a role in our journey of faith and in our cooperation with God's grace.

In summary, while good works are not the means by which we initially receive God's grace and justification, they are necessary for our ongoing journey of faith, growth in holiness, and cooperation with God's grace. Good works are the fruit of our faith and love, and they play a role in our response to God's gift of salvation.

THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

THE VIRTUES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

How do we know that we have received the Holy Spirit? Let us consider several ways in which, taken together, we are assured that the Holy Spirit is transforming our daily lives and leading us onward in sanctification and perfection in Christ.

First, we have received the sacraments of the Church. Christ gives us the sacraments through the power of his Holy Spirit.

Second, we are acting more and more like Jesus did. Our lifestyles are reflecting the values and teachings of Jesus.

Third, we are thinking and feeling more like Jesus did. Our inward desires are being transformed into Gospel values.

Fourth, we are experiencing the Fruits of the Spirit in our lives. We notice these traits in our lives, and others notice them too.

Fifth, we are making good use of the Gifts of the Spirit. We consciously and conscientiously apply these spiritual gifts.

Sixth, we are providing a good example to others. Authenticity makes a difference that other people both notice and desire.

Seventh, we are inviting others to experience the Spirit. We intentionally reach out to others as missionary disciples.

In our pursuit of virtuous excellence in the spiritual life, we want to become holy as the Lord himself is holy. We want to become perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. We want to fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, the Church. We want to work out our salvation in fear and trembling. The Lord wants us to do all of these things, and when we commit our lives to him, his Holy Spirit dwells within us to help us accomplish his will.

THE MORAL (CARDINAL) VIRTUES

Prudence: Prudence is the virtue that enables us to discern what is good and to choose the right means to achieve it. It helps us make sound judgments and decisions in accordance with moral principles.

Justice: Justice is the virtue that guides us to give each person their due, respecting their rights and fulfilling our obligations towards them. It promotes fairness, equality, and respect for the dignity of all.

Fortitude: Fortitude is the virtue that strengthens us to face difficulties, challenges, and temptations with courage and perseverance. It empowers us to stand firm in our convictions and to endure hardships for the sake of what is right.

Temperance: Temperance is the virtue that moderates our desires and passions, ensuring that they are in harmony with reason and the moral law. It helps us exercise self-control and avoid excesses in our pursuit of pleasure and material goods.

These human virtues are raised to a new supernatural level when the Holy Spirit dwells within our minds and hearts. How can these virtues become more evident in your daily life?

THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES

Faith: Faith is the virtue by which we believe in God and all that He has revealed to us. It involves assenting to divine truths with trust and confidence, even when they are beyond our complete understanding. Faith allows us to have a personal relationship with God and to entrust ourselves to His loving care.

Hope: Hope is the virtue that enables us to trust in God's promises and to desire eternal life with Him. It gives us confidence in God's mercy and the expectation of receiving His grace. Hope sustains us in times of difficulty and uncertainty, reminding us that God is faithful and that our ultimate fulfillment lies in Him.

Charity (or Love): Charity is the greatest of all virtues and the fulfillment of the Law. It is the virtue that empowers us to love God above all things and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Charity is not merely a feeling or emotion but an active choice to will the good of others. It involves selflessness, compassion, and a desire to serve and sacrifice for the well-being of others.

Faith is never alone. Faith is always accompanied by hope and love. The grace of the Holy Spirit keeps them together. How can these virtues be more fruitful in your faith life?