

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 POWER OF VIRTUE OVER VICE

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 SEVEN DEADLY VICIES

Versus the Seven Saving Virtues

Pride: Excessive self-centeredness, an inflated sense of one's own importance, and a disregard for the dignity of others. It is the root of all sins and opposes the virtue of humility.

Greed (Avarice): An insatiable desire for material possessions, wealth, or power. It involves an excessive attachment to worldly goods and can lead to exploitation and injustice.

Lust: Unrestrained and disordered sexual desire or indulgence. It involves treating others as objects of pleasure rather than respecting their dignity and can lead to the objectification and exploitation of others.

Envy: Resentment or sadness at the sight of another person's good fortune or success. It involves a desire to possess what others have and can lead to bitterness, gossip, and even harm towards others.

Gluttony: Excessive and unrestrained consumption of food or drink. It involves the misuse of the pleasures of eating and drinking and can lead to the neglect of one's health and the exploitation of resources.

Wrath (Anger): Uncontrolled and excessive anger or rage. It involves a desire for revenge, harm, or destruction and can lead to violence, hatred, and the breakdown of relationships.

Sloth: Apathy, laziness, or neglect of one's duties and responsibilities. It involves a lack of effort or motivation to fulfill one's obligations and can lead to spiritual stagnation and the neglect of one's own growth and the needs of others.

THE SEVEN SAVING VIRTUES

Versus the Seven Deadly Vices

Humility is the virtue that helps us recognize our own limitations and acknowledge that all good things come from God. It helps us to be modest, grateful, and to avoid excessive self-centeredness. Humility conquers pride.

Charity, or love, is the virtue that helps us overcome greed and selfishness. It involves selfless love and concern for the well-being of others, as well as generosity in sharing our resources with those in need.

Chastity is the virtue that helps us order our sexual desires (lust) according to God's plan. It involves purity of heart, mind, and body, and promotes self-control and respect for ourselves and others.

Kindness is the virtue that helps us overcome envy and resentment towards others. It involves being compassionate, supportive, and rejoicing in the good fortune of others.

Temperance is the virtue that helps us moderate our desires for food, drink, and other pleasures (gluttony). It enables us to enjoy these things in a balanced and moderate way, avoiding excess and overindulgence.

Patience is the virtue that helps us control our anger (wrath) and respond to difficult situations with calmness and understanding. It involves enduring hardships and difficulties with grace and without losing our temper.

Diligence is the virtue that helps us overcome laziness and apathy (sloth). It involves being industrious, responsible, and committed to fulfilling our duties and responsibilities with enthusiasm and perseverance.