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Grace: A Most Precious and Loving Gift from God

Through the merits of Christ

1.) As we have seen previously, grace is a freely given gift from God. It is God alone who sanctifies and makes us holy and righteous. Can we merit from God, or is it God alone? What role, if any, do we have? What does merit mean, and why is that important? When merit and grace are misunderstood, they can have a negative influence on our lives and our faith.

Original Sin and Merit

2.) ***What does merit mean?*** The term merit means “to earn or deserve payment.”¹ In Christianity, merit implies earning the supernatural rewards from God.

3.) ***How does Original Sin relate?*** Original Sin destroyed the original harmony between men and women, their soul's powers were weakened, and divine grace and communion with God were lost. Stripped of original justice and holiness, humanity stands unable to reconcile or redeem itself.

3.) Holiness and divine friendship were established and originated by God. Imagine unplugging a lamp. It wouldn't matter how many times you flipped the switch or changed the bulb; without electricity, it won't light up. Original Sin unplugged us from God. Just as the lamp can't light itself, humanity cannot create or reestablish original justice and righteousness. Because of the loss of grace and sanctity, we can do nothing to “earn, deserve, or merit” justification. Humanity owed God an atonement it could not pay.

¹ Modern Catholic Dictionary, p.348

Jesus Christ and Merit

"God put forth Jesus Christ as an expiation by his blood." ²

4.) In the OT, the high priest made an offering of blood in atonement for sin. What does *atonement* mean? Atonement means to *"set at one, to reconcile, to be of one mind."* ³ God the Father knows we cannot atone for ourselves, nor can we reconcile ourselves to him. When the *"Word became flesh and dwelt among us,"* ⁴ He united his humanity with his divinity. In doing so, God took the initiative by forming his human flesh in Mary's virginal womb. This humanity, his humanity as true man, would become the blood offering to atone for the sins of all humanity. As the true God, He alone could reconcile humanity to Himself through Christ.

5.) By becoming man, God was re-establishing man in original justice and righteousness. In the Catechism, we read, *"Christ's whole life is a mystery of redemption, redemption through the blood of his cross."* ⁵ As God, he had the righteousness necessary to cleanse us of sins. As a man, Jesus stands as an exemplar and model of a life crowned with the justice and righteousness of God. As a man, Jesus was perfectly obedient to the Father, reversing the effects of sin's rebellion.

6.) Our Lord's Passion, Death, and Resurrection was the supreme act that earned or merited justification for all of humanity. So yes, Jesus Christ made atonement for our sins, reconciled us to the Father; through Christ and with the Holy Spirit, graces our lives with righteousness.

Conclusion

7.) The graces, especially sanctifying grace, that God gives are the holy life of the Eternal High Priest who stands before the Father. Grace is not a magical superpower; the Father, through the Son and Holy Spirit, gifts you a share of his divine life. Christ's life of grace joins itself to the soul, to perfect it, to sanctify it, to heal it. The life of Christ, the perfect union of God and man, is given through grace. This life is offered to you because God loves you that much; you mean that much to him. Christ and the Holy Spirit dwell in the soul, bringing the merits of reconciliation and salvation. God does not expect or demand

² CCC #433, Rom 3:25, 2 Cor 5:19

³ Modern Catholic Dictionary, p.47

⁴ John 1:14

⁵ CCC #517

that we impress him to gain his favor; God knows we cannot. He gave his life so that, dead to sin, we could live in him to the glory of God.

8.) Consider for a moment this most precious and loving gift from God, the gift of his grace and merit. Our Lord knocks on the door of your heart and soul, not to condemn it, but to love it and transform it. It is a blessing to consider that God doesn't demand we make ourselves holy and earn back our salvation. Through the merits of Jesus Christ, Our Lord, that price is already paid. Through his Son in unity with the Holy Spirit, God wishes to apply that grace to all of us. Through Christ's actions, atonement has been paid and merit gained.

9.) Our Divine Redeemer awaits our response; he will not force us. In next Sunday's bulletin, we will explore our role in merit. How can man merit? Our merit is secondary and cooperative, that's next week.

Love the Lord Jesus, let him love you and go in peace.

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