

THE GRACE OF GOD

When I was a Catechist, I was struck dumb by a question from a nine-year-old girl. She asked me, "What is grace?" I just sat there thinking, knowing I could not answer her question then and there.

I resolved my problem by telling her that it needed a lengthy explanation and that I would answer her at the start of the next lesson. I did this after some research, mainly on the Internet.

What I did find out, once again made me realise how much I'd forgotten about my religion since my school days.

There are many in-depth explanations online, but the following is a very simple explanation of God's Grace.

His undying love for us is shown by the way Grace provides us with ways of keeping our eternal souls free from mortal sin so that when we die, our souls will be with him in heaven for all eternity. This great love of God is not earned or justified but is a helping hand given and available to us freely at all times. It is the Grace of God.

The Catholic Church has helped us understand 'God's Grace' by organising it into different types such as Sacramental Grace and others, but the two major ones are:

1. Sanctifying Grace
2. Actual Grace

Sanctifying Grace is special because it can only reside in the soul. For it to do this, the soul must be free from mortal sin. It's what makes the soul acceptable to God; that is, being able to share in his life and love in heaven when we die. Sanctifying Grace comes to us first in baptism, replacing any mortal, venial, or original sins.

The sacrament of Reconciliation is the only other sacrament that replaces all sins with Sanctifying Grace. Again, this sacrament shows God's great love for all of us, yet many of us don't take advantage of this truly great sacrament.

Maintaining our souls free from mortal sin at all times should be everyone's ambition.

ACTual Grace is the ability God gives us to act as he wants. It's always available to us without having to ask for it when we need to perform good deeds or overcome a temptation. God's always-available grace can be seen as a helping hand urging us to top up the Sanctifying Grace in our soul and help us act in ways that do not jeopardise it.

The principal ways of obtaining Actual Grace are prayer and the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist.

The sacraments of Baptism and Penance are the only ones that give Sanctifying Grace to the soul; the other sacraments and corporal works of mercy increase Sanctifying Grace in the souls. The more Sanctifying Grace we have, the less likely we are to sin and it helps us to effectively fend off any temptations of Satan.

After telling the young girl my simple explanation of Grace, I became a fervent advocate of the sacrament of Reconciliation. It continually reminded me that it's only when our souls have Sanctifying Grace that they are acceptable to God.

ALWAYS ACCEPT AND USE GOD'S FREE GIFT OF GRACE WISELY.