

The Holy Spirit and Grace



RCIA Handouts:

Pages:

1. "Grace: What It Is and What It Does"

2 – 5

2. "Virtue" Information Handout

6 – 9

Grace: What It Is and What It Does

You may recall that there are two kinds of grace, sanctifying and actual. The name being so similar, you might have the impression sanctifying grace is nearly identical to actual grace. Not so.

Sanctifying grace stays in the soul. It's what makes the soul holy; it gives the soul supernatural life. More properly, it *is* supernatural life.

Actual grace, by contrast, is a supernatural push or encouragement. It's transient. It doesn't live in the soul, but acts on the soul from the outside, so to speak. It's a supernatural kick in the pants. It gets the will and intellect moving so we can seek out and keep sanctifying grace.

Imagine yourself transported instantaneously to the bottom of the ocean. What's the very first thing you'll do? That's right: die. You'd die because you aren't equipped to live underwater. You don't have the right breathing apparatus. If you want to live in the deep blue sea, you need equipment you aren't provided with naturally; you need something that will elevate you above your nature, something super – (that is, “above”) natural, such as oxygen tanks.

It's much the same with your soul. In its natural state, it isn't fit for heaven. It doesn't have the right equipment, and if you die with your soul in its natural state, heaven won't be for you. What you need to live there is supernatural life, not just natural life. That supernatural life is called sanctifying grace. The reason you need sanctifying grace to be able to live in heaven is because you will be in perfect and absolute union with God, the source of all life (cf. Gal. 2:19, 1 Pet. 3:18).

If sanctifying grace dwells in your soul when you die, then you have the equipment you need, and you can live in heaven (though you may need to be purified first in purgatory; cf. 1 Cor. 3:12-16). If it doesn't dwell in your soul when you die; in other words, if your soul is spiritually dead by being in the state of mortal sin (Gal. 5:19-21), you cannot live in heaven. You then have to face an eternity of spiritual death: the utter separation of your spirit from God (Eph. 2:1, 2:5, 4:18). The worst part of this eternal separation will be that you yourself would have caused it to be that way.

Spiritual Suicide

You can obtain supernatural life by yielding to actual graces you receive. God keeps giving you these divine pushes, and all you have to do is go along.

For instance, he moves you to repentance, and if you take the hint you can find yourself in the confessional, where the guilt for your sins is remitted (John 20:21-

23). Through the sacrament of penance, through your reconciliation to God, you receive sanctifying grace. But you can lose it again by sinning mortally (1 John 5:16-17).

Keep that word in mind: mortal. It means death. Mortal sins are deadly sins because they kill off this supernatural life, this sanctifying grace. Mortal sins can't coexist with the supernatural life, because by their nature such sins are saying "No" to God, while sanctifying grace would be saying "Yes."

Venial sins don't destroy supernatural life, and they don't even lessen it. Mortal sins destroy it outright. The trouble with venial sins is that they weaken us, making us more vulnerable to mortal sins.

When you lose supernatural life, there's nothing you can do on your own to regain it. You're reduced to the merely natural life again, and no natural act can merit a supernatural reward. You can merit a supernatural reward only by being made able to act above your nature, which you can do only if you have help – grace.

To regain supernatural life, you have to receive actual graces from God. Think of these as helping graces. Such graces differ from sanctifying grace in that they aren't a quality of the soul and don't abide in it. Rather, actual graces enable the soul to perform some supernatural act, such as an act of faith or repentance. If the soul responds to actual grace and makes the appropriate supernatural act, it again receives supernatural life.

Really Cleansed

Sanctifying grace implies a real transformation of the soul. We believe souls are cleansed by an infusion of the supernatural life. Paul speaks of us as "a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17), "created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:24). Of course, we're still subject to temptations to sin; we still suffer the effects of Adam's Fall in that sense (what theologians call "concupiscence"); but God removes the guilt from our souls. We may still have a tendency to sin, but God has removed the sins we have, much like a mother might wash the dirt off a child who has a tendency to get dirty again.

Our souls don't become something other than souls when God cleanses them and pours his grace into them (what the Bible refers to as "infused" ["poured"] grace, cf. Acts 10:45, Rom. 5:5, Titus 3:5-7); they don't cease to be what they were before. When grace elevates nature, our intellects are given the new power of faith, something they don't have at the merely natural level. Our wills are given the new powers of hope and charity, things also absent at the merely natural level.

Justification and Sanctification

We've mentioned that we need sanctifying grace in our souls if we're to be equipped for heaven. Another way of saying this is that we need to be justified. "But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).

So, when God declares you justified, he makes you justified. Any justification that is not woven together with sanctification is no justification at all. The Bible's teaching on justification is more nuanced. Paul indicates that there is a real transformation which occurs in justification, that it is not just a change in legal status. This is seen, for example, in Romans 6:7, "For he who has died is freed from sin" (or a close variant).

Paul is obviously speaking about being freed from sin in an experiential sense, for this is the passage where he is at pains to stress the fact that we have made a decisive break with sin that must be reflected in our behavior: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom. 6:1-2) "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness" (Rom. 6:12-13).

According to Scripture, sanctification and justification aren't just one-time events, but are ongoing processes in the life of the believer. Both can be spoken of as past-time events, as Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 6:11: "But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." Sanctification is also a present, ongoing process, as the author of Hebrews notes: "For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Heb. 10:14).

Can Justification Be Lost?

If you sin grievously, the supernatural life in your soul disappears, since it can't co-exist with serious sin. You then cease to be justified. If you were to die while unjustified, you'd go to hell. But you can become re-justified by having the supernatural life renewed in your soul, and you can do that by responding to the actual graces God sends you.

Acting on Actual Graces

He sends you an actual grace, say, in the form of a nagging voice that whispers, “You need to repent! Go to confession!” You do, your sins are forgiven, you’re reconciled to God, and you have supernatural life again (John 20:21-23). Or you say to yourself, “Maybe tomorrow,” and that particular supernatural impulse, that actual grace, passes you by. But another is always on the way, God never abandoning us to our own stupidity (1 Tim. 2:4).

Once you have supernatural life, once sanctifying grace is in your soul, you can increase it by every supernaturally good action you do: receiving Communion, saying prayers, performing the corporal works of mercy. Is it worth increasing sanctifying grace once you have it; isn’t the minimum enough? Yes and no. It’s enough to get you into heaven, but it may not be enough to sustain itself. It’s easy to fall from grace, as you know. The more solidly you’re wed to sanctifying grace, the more likely you can withstand temptations.

And if you do that, you maintain sanctifying grace. In other words, once you achieve the supernatural life, you don’t want to take it easy. The minimum isn’t good enough because it’s easy to lose the minimum. We must continually seek God’s grace, continually respond to the actual graces God is working within us, inclining us to turn to him and do good. This is what Paul discusses when he instructs us: “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain” (Phil. 2:12-16).

“Virtue” Information Handout

The goal of a **virtuous life** is to become like God. **Virtue** is a habitual and firm disposition to do **good**.

Spectrum of Love

Patience
Sincerity
Unselfishness

Kindness
Courtesy

Generosity
Good Temper

Humility
Guilelessness

[From Paul’s Way of Love, Letter to Corinthians]

Pat’s kindness generally hums since courtesy and good temper guiles unselfish ones.

The Spirit of Mary

1. **Profound Humility**
 2. **Lively Faith**
 3. **Perfect Obedience**
 4. **Continual Prayer**
 5. **Universal Mortification**
 6. **Spotless Purity**
 7. **Ardent Charity**
 8. **Heroic Patience**
 9. **Angelic Sweetness**
 10. **Heavenly Wisdom**
- Amen

[From The Official Handbook of the Legion of Mary]

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Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Wisdom
Understanding
Counsel
Fortitude
Knowledge
Piety
Fear of the Lord

They complete the Virtues of those who receive them. The Moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

[From the Catechism of the Catholic Church]

Twelve Fruits of the Spirit

Charity	Joy	Peace	Patience
Kindness	Goodness	Generosity	Gentleness
Faithfulness	Modesty	Self Control	Chastity

They are **Perfections** that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the First Fruits of Eternal glory. The Tradition of the Church lists twelve of them.

Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues; hence in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance. Similarly, it is the best disposition to receive celestial gifts. Finally, it is so necessary for perfection that, among all the ways to reach it, the first is humility, the second is humility, and the third is humility. And if I were asked about it one hundred times, I would still give the same answer.

St. Augustine

Humility is the mother of many virtues because from it obedience, fear, reverence, patience, modesty, meekness and peace are born. He who is humble obeys everyone, fears to offend everyone, is at peace with everyone, is kind with all, is submissive to everyone, does not offend or displease anyone, does not resent the injuries inflicted upon him; he lives happy, contented and in great peace.

St. Thomas of Villanova

Cardinal Virtues

Prudence Justice Fortitude Temperance

These four play a pivotal role and all others are grouped around them. Latin Cardo = hinge

Theological Virtues

Faith Hope Charity

The human virtues are rooted in these three. They adapt our faculties for participation in the divine nature.

The Beatitudes Confront the Seven Deadly Sins

Vices

(Seven Deadly Sins)

vs

Virtues

(Beatitudes)

Pride

(Self Assertion, Selfishness)

Poverty of Spirit

(Humility, Selflessness)

Avarice

(Greed, Grab & keep world's goods for oneself)

Mercy

(To give & share world's goods with others)

Envy

(Resents another's happiness)

Mourning

(Shares another's unhappiness)

Wrath

(Wills harm & destruction)

Meekness & Peacemaking

(Refuses to harm, Peacekeeping, Prevents destruction)

Sloth

(Refuses to exert will toward the good)

Hunger & Thirst for Righteousness

(Exerts the will toward the good)

Lust

(Dissipates, Divides the soul, Desiring every attractive body)

Purity of Heart

(Centers & unifies the soul, Desiring God alone)

Gluttony

(Needs to consume inordinate amount of worldly goods)

Bearing Persecution

(Being deprived of even ordinate necessities)

[From Back to Virtue by Peter Kreeft]

The Boy Scout Law

A scout is Trustworthy

A scout is Loyal

A scout is Helpful

A scout is Friendly

A scout is Courteous

A scout is Kind

A scout is Obedient

A scout is Cheerful

A scout is Thrifty

A scout is Brave

A scout is Clean

A scout is Reverent

The Girl Scout Law

I will do my best:

- to be honest
- to be fair
- to help where I am needed
- to be cheerful
- to be friendly and considerate
- to be a sister to every Girl Scout
- to respect authority
- to use resources wisely
- to protect and improve the world around me
- to show respect for myself and others through my words and actions.

[Both Scout Laws from The Book of Virtues by William J. Bennett]

God greatly desires us to be so perfect as to be one with Him. Let us examine ourselves and see what is still lacking in us to reach this goal.

St. Teresa of Avila