

sanctifying grace. Prayer is the key to the treasury of God's grace. *"Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full"* (John 16:24). Never miss Sunday Mass and avail yourself of the sacrament of reconciliation as often as possible for these are the divinely instituted channels through which God ordained that His graces should flow into our souls. It is by this means we can keep ourselves from falling into pride, and all other sins to which we are subject. It is by prayer and the sacraments that we can obtain that clear light of grace by which we can see ourselves as we really are, so that we may say as St. Paul said: *"By the grace of God I am what I am."*

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Grace

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We have been made to know, love, and serve God here on earth, and after our death to be happy with Him forever in heaven. But we are utterly unable by our own natural powers to do these things, or to reach our goal. It is by God's grace alone we can expect to gain eternal life. Without God's help or grace we cannot avoid evil or do anything good. *"Apart from me," Jesus says, "you can do nothing"* (John 15:5). *"No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit"* (1 Cor. 12:3). *"No one can come to me," Jesus says, "unless the Father who sent me draws him"* (John 6:44). St. Paul says, *"Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God"* (2 Cor. 3:5). And again, he says: *"By the grace of God I am what I am"* (1 Cor. 15:10).

Grace is a supernatural gift of God to an intelligent creature, bestowed to enable us to merit eternal life. There are two kinds of grace, actual and sanctifying (also called habitual). Actual grace is a supernatural help given to us by God to avoid evil and to do good, it affects the faculties of will and intellect. Actual grace operates in the soul by illuminating it, so that a person can differentiate between good and evil and choose to do good. St. Augustine explained grace as the "will and performance." He explained, that we cannot take credit for any beneficial act we perform as it is in actuality

God working in and through us to accomplish His will.

Our actions, no matter how good in themselves, can have no merit in the eyes of God, unless they are elevated by His grace. For our works become meritorious only through the merits of Christ, and Christ's merits cannot be applied to us without grace. God gives everyone, even the most hardened and blinded sinners, a sufficiency of grace to work out their salvation. The words, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness,*" (2 Cor. 12:9) apply to all. "*As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live*" (Ezk. 33:11).

"But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift" (Eph. 4:7). God does not give every person the same amount of grace; some get more, some less, yet all receive sufficient grace. God expects us to respond to the grace that He gives us, otherwise we can lose our salvation. God does not look forward to anyone rejecting His graces and woe to him that does so.

When a sinner repeatedly rejects the grace of God, then God will withdraw His most powerful graces (though He does not withdraw all His graces), and the sinner becomes hardened and blinded. "*Do you presume upon the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But by your hard and*

impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed" (Rom. 2:4-5). We will be held accountable by God not only for all the graces we have received from Him, but also for all the other graces which He would have showered upon us had we not put obstacles in His way.

As we have free will, we may put up an obstacle to grace. Grace does not do anything that would take away our free will, nor does it force us to do anything contrary to our will. Grace enables us to will and to do that, which we could neither will nor do without grace. Grace in no way interferes with free will. Our experience, should, only too well teach us how often we have resisted the action of God's grace in our lives. "*Who has been tested by it and been found perfect? Let it be for him a ground for boasting. Who has had the power to transgress and did not transgress, and to do evil and did not do it?*" (Sir. 31:10). Grace, therefore, does not destroy our free will, but it strengthens, corrects, and perfects it.

Sanctifying grace is that grace which sanctifies the soul and makes it pleasing to God. It also has an absolutely supernatural quality, essentially and permanently dwelling in the soul by which we are made sons and daughters of God. The moment we receive the precious gift of sanctifying grace we pass from the state of sin to the state of grace. "*The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7). God will turn again and have mercy on us; He will put

away our sins and remember them no more. "*Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord*" (Acts 3:19).

Sanctifying grace gives us a title as heirs to the kingdom of heaven, makes us temples of the Holy Spirit, gives a merit to all our good works, beautifies the soul, and clothes it with the habit of the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. St. Paul says that sanctifying grace is "*God's love...poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us*" (Rom. 5:5). A soul in a state of grace enjoys a perpetual feast, for it enjoys the peace of God, which passes all understanding. By grace Christ communicates to us the same splendor which He received from God: "*The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one*" (John 17:22). The full beauty of the Blessed Trinity dwells in a soul in the state of grace. "*If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him*" (John 14:23).

The grace of God is an immense treasure. Nothing, not all the riches in the world can remotely compare with it. It is a powerful and necessary instrument of our salvation; for it is by grace we are delivered from our past sins, and preserved from sins in the time to come. Let us, then, frequently pray to God, and always through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, for an increase of