

Catechumenate Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA
Fourth Sunday of Lent • Year B • March 10, 2024



O God,
who is like to you?
Who can compare
to your greatness?
We had wandered
from you in sin,
but you searched us out
and brought us back.
Your love surpasses
our transgressions.
Your grace is enough
that we might be
made new. Amen.

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Sunday Word

2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23
Psalm 137:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6
Ephesians 2:4-10
John 3:14-21

Exile and Liberation

Israel ignores the precepts of the Lord to its own peril. The nation is overrun and its people are sent into exile. A foreign king, moved by the Lord God, manifests the Almighty's mercy and love to his people as they are returned to their homeland.

Sin and Grace

God, rich in mercy, brings believers to new life in Christ despite their shortcomings and sinfulness. Saint Paul reminds us that we are given a new lease on life in Christ not by our own doing but by God's sheer generosity.

Condemnation and Salvation

Jesus speaks with Nicodemus, telling him that all who believe in God's Son will inherit newness of life. All who entrust themselves to this belief will not perish but will be given everlasting life.

Church Teaching: The Grace of God

God's Grace

The very term in Latin, *gratia*, carries with it a wealth of meaning, such as "gift," favor," "loving-kindness," and "the thanksgiving that accompanies a gift." Simply put, grace is God's gift to us.

It is undeserved. It is freely given. It enables us to respond to God, who calls us to be his adopted sons and daughters. As such, we are promised eternal life because God wishes to endow us with his life.

Grace involves our participation in the mystery of God. It opens for us a share in this awesome mystery. Through Baptism the doorway is opened for us to step into this lovely mystery. By incorporation into the Paschal Mystery, we gain entry into something we could never step into on our own. We are put into

relationship with God the Father, in union with his only Son, propelled into the life of the Holy Spirit, who lavishes charity on us and forms the Church.

Manifold Forms of Grace

Catholics distinguish between different types of grace:

- ◆ *Sanctifying grace*, given to us in Baptism, makes us holy and heals us of sin. It makes us a wholly new creation and promotes within us a supernatural disposition.
- ◆ *Actual grace* is given to us throughout our lives to help us. This particular giftedness arrives as a specific intervention from God in the varying circumstances of life to further our holiness and stability in the divine life.
- ◆ *Sacramental grace* is given through the Seven Sacraments as they are each celebrated.
- ◆ *Special grace or charism* is manifested in unique and miraculous ways. It is intended for the good of the Church in order to build her up.
- ◆ *Grace of state* is given for particular ministries within the Church, in order that service may be rendered appropriately.

Distinctiveness of Church Teaching

All these different kinds of grace demonstrate the tremendous love God has for us. We experience God's divine gifts in so many different and varied ways, according to the circumstances and situations of our lives. God is faithful to the promised gift of divine presence to us in an everlasting Covenant established by the Blood of Christ. This gift of God's love, and the many divine graces which accompany it, surpasses the natural proportions of our human nature. That is why the Church describes our vocation to eternal life as supernatural. On our own, we could never hope to achieve union with God. It is only with God's help that we can find our way to everlasting happiness with him.

Key Terms

CHARISM

Specific gift of the Holy Spirit, given in order that a person may live out the Christian life, which directly or indirectly benefits the Church (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 799).

GRACE

Free and absolutely undeserved gift that God bestows so that we might respond to our supernatural vocation (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1996).

SUPERNATURAL

Going beyond the power of created things; resulting from the gift of God (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1998).

Voices of Faith

God, who loved the world, gave his only begotten Son as a manifest token of his love. . . . Gifts of price are the evidence of affection: the greatness of the surrender is evidence of the greatness of the love. . . . Here is the proof of his love and affection, that he gave his own, his only begotten Son.

—Saint Hilary of Poitiers

Love and life according to the Gospel cannot be thought of first and foremost as a kind of precept, because what they demand is beyond [our] abilities. They are possible only as a result of a gift of God who heals, restores, and transforms the human heart by his grace.

—Pope John Paul II

Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1987 (grace justifies us before God), 1996 (grace, the free undeserved help from God), 2005 (grace known only by faith)

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults:

Chapter 24, especially the section entitled "Grace and Justification," pages 328–330

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church:

423 (sanctifying grace), 424 (other graces), 425 (grace and human freedom), 426 (merit)