

Saved by Grace through Faith, Not Works (4th Sunday of Lent, Year B)

Ephesians 2:4-10—Saved by Grace through Faith, Not Works

God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not because of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:4-10)

1. Love = “love” (Greek *agapē*) (2:4)
2. Mercy = “mercy” (Greek *eleos*) (2:4)
3. Spiritual Death = “dead through our trespasses” (2:5)
4. Saved: “you have been saved (Greek *sōzō*)” (2:6, 8)
5. Grace: “by grace” (Greek *charis*) (2:8)
6. Faith: “through faith” (Greek *pistis*) (2:8)
7. Works: “not because of works” (Greek *ouk ex ergōn*) (2:9)

The Living Tradition

Thomas Aquinas: [T]o be saved is the same as to be justified... But this salvation is of grace and is “by faith” in Christ. In the justification of an adult who has sinned, the movement of faith towards God coincides with the infusion of grace... *The second error he [Paul] rejects is that anyone can believe that faith is given by God to us on the merit of our preceding actions.* To exclude this he adds “not of” preceding “works” that we merited at one time to be saved; for this is the grace, as was mentioned above, and according to what is written: “if by grace, it is not now by works; otherwise grace is no more grace” (Rom 11:6). (Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Ephesians*, no. 293, 296; trans. F. Larcher and M. Lamb)

Council of Trent: [W]e are said to be justified gratuitously because *nothing that precedes justification, neither faith nor works, merits the grace of justification*; for “if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise (as the same apostle [Paul] says) grace would no longer be grace” (Rom 11:6). (Council of Trent, *Decree on Justification*, Chapter 8).

Catechism: Since the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, *no one can merit the initial grace* of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion. (CCC 2010)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (4th Sunday of Lent, Year B)

1. What does Paul mean when he says we are saved “by grace” through “faith” (Eph 2:4)? According to Catholic doctrine, what role do our good works play in the initial grace of being justified?

For Further Reading

1. Peter S. Williamson. *Ephesians*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009.