

3. Grace & Sacramental Living

Grace

God give his own life and friendship to us. We call this gift grace. We do not earn or deserve God's grace. Grace allows us to become God's adopted children and to respond to his abundant love.

Key terms

Grace	A share in God's life and friendship that is his free and undeserved gift to us so that we can answer his call to become his adopted children.
Actual Grace	Grace that helps at particular moment to live in accordance with God's will to do good and avoid evil.
Charism	Grace in the form of special gifts that are to be used for the good of the Church.
Justification	The action of God's grace by which we are freed from sin and made holy.
Sanctifying grace:	An enduring, stable gift of grace that makes the soul holy; it gives the soul supernatural life making it possible for us to abide in God and prompts us to live a life of supernatural charity.
Sacramental grace:	The sacramental grace given by the Holy Spirit and the particular grace specific to each of the sacraments.

Grace is the basis for the Christian faith. We believe we are saved by faith through grace. God's grace is usually defined as undeserved favour. Grace cannot be earned; it is something that is freely given. Grace is the opposite of karma, which is all about getting what you deserve. Grace is getting what you don't deserve. Therefore, grace is a free-gift given by God because it is essential to the character of God - God's benevolence, love, and mercy. The gift of grace has been given to us by God so that we may give it to others, even if we do not think they deserve it.

God's Grace at Work in Humanity's Story

To fully understand grace, we need to consider who we were without Christ and who we become with Christ. We were born in sin (Psalm 51:5), and we were guilty of breaking God's holy laws (Romans 3:9–20, 23; 1 John 1:8–10). We were enemies of God (Romans 5:6, 10; 8:7; Colossians 1:21), deserving of death (Romans 6:23a). We were unrighteous (Romans 3:10) and without means of justifying ourselves (Romans 3:20). Spiritually, we were destitute, blind, unclean, and dead. Our souls were in peril of everlasting punishment.

But then God extended His favour to humanity. Grace is what saves us (Ephesians 2:8). Grace is the essence of the gospel (Acts 20:24). Grace gives us victory over sin (James 4:6). Grace gives us “eternal encouragement and good hope” (2 Thessalonians 2:16). St. Paul repeatedly identified grace as the basis of his calling as an apostle (Romans 15:15; 1

Corinthians 3:10; Ephesians 3:2, 7). Jesus Christ is the embodiment of grace, coupled with truth (John 1:14). The Bible repeatedly calls grace a “gift” (e.g., Ephesians 4:7).

Finally, the Bible teaches that grace is completely *unmerited*. The gift and the act of giving have nothing at all to do with our merit or innate quality (Romans 4:4; 11:5–6; 2 Timothy 1:9–10). In fact, the Bible says quite clearly that we don’t deserve God’s salvation.

Romans 5:8–10 says, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. . . . While we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son.” Grace does not stop once we are saved; God is gracious to us for the rest of our lives, working within and upon us.

Explore instances in the candidates’ life where they can recognise God’s *grace* at work.

EXAMPLE: God’s grace moves someone to repentance, and if open and aware of the power of that grace, it can lead to a sacramental encounter with the Lord in confession, where the guilt of sin is remitted (John 20:21–23). Through the sacrament of penance, through reconciliation to God, the penitent receives sanctifying grace.

The Biblical Meaning of Grace

Grace is the basis for:

- **Our Christian identity:** “By the grace of God I am what I am.” (1 Corinthians 1:10)
- **Our standing before God:** “this grace in which we stand.” (Romans 5:2)
- **Our behaviour:** “We behaved in the world ... by the grace of God.” (2 Corinthians 2:12)
- **Our living:** those who receive “the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ,” (Romans 5:17) by the “grace of life.” (1 Peter 1:7)
- **Our holiness:** God “called us to a holy calling ... because of his own purpose and grace.” (2 Timothy 2:9)
- **Our strength for living:** “Be strengthened by the grace that is in Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:1), for “it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace.” (Hebrews 13:9)
- **Our way of speaking:** “Let your speech always be gracious.” (Colossians 4:6)
- **Our serving:** “serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” (1 Peter 1:10)
- **Our sufficiency:** “My grace is sufficient for you.” (2 Corinthians 2:9). “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.” (2 Corinthians 2:8)
- **Our response to difficulty and suffering:** We get “grace to help in time of need,” (Hebrews 4:16) and when “you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace...will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” (1 Peter 1:10)
- **Our participation in God’s mission:** As recipients of grace, we are privileged to serve as agents of grace. Believers receive grace (Acts 11:23), are encouraged to continue in

grace (Acts 13:43), and are called to testify to the grace of God (Acts 20:24). Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21). God’s mission is to the entire world.

- **Our future:** God and His grace, is everlasting. “Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 1:13)
 - **Our hope beyond death:** “grace reigns through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 5:21)
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Sacramental Living

Catholic life revolves around the relationship of prayer and the outpouring of grace that comes from the liturgy and sacraments. Our hope of perfection in love and union with God is founded in the sacramental life. We cannot achieve holiness without God’s grace, but we must also cooperate with his grace, first given to us in Baptism and then poured out upon us in the other sacraments.

To live a sacramental life also means to be immersed in the life and prayer of the church. The church’s liturgy is where this is most profoundly done. *Full and active participation in the Mass as often as possible is essential.*

A liturgical, sacramental life includes:

- Attendance at Holy Mass as the centre of the week
 - Frequent reception of Holy Communion
 - Reverence towards Jesus in the Eucharist
 - Regular reception of the sacrament of Reconciliation
 - Reading and meditating on sacred Scripture and other spiritual works
 - Liturgical prayer, the Liturgy of the Hours, the Rosary, prayer before and after meals, examination of conscience at bedtime, pilgrimages etc.
 - Living in harmony with the liturgical year – times of penance and fasting
 - Sacrificial, charitable, corporal works of mercy
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Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. Do I have to accept God’s grace?
2. How is grace linked to becoming children of God?
3. What does it mean to say that all sacraments confer gifts specific to the purpose of each?
4. Why is sanctifying (or sacramental) grace not something to which we have an automatic right?
5. If grace is a free gift from God, and we cannot earn it, why then do we increase in grace by doing good works?

6. How would we know that grace is active in our lives?
7. How can we meet Jesus in the Holy Eucharist?
8. In what ways can frequently receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation help us to lead a sacramental life?

PRAYER

Pray together Psalm 18 or Psalm 23

or

Gospel Reflection: Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A Mt. 22:34-40

Year B Mk. 10:46-52

Year C Lk. 18:9-14

The following format will be used for all Gospel reflections:

- Read the text aloud.
- Pause for a minute's silence.
- Read the text aloud again.
- Ask everyone to pick a word or a phrase that struck them. They just say the word or phrase without comment or discussion.
- Read the text again.
- Ask those present to comment on their word or phrase. What struck them about it? Why/how is it speaking to them?
- Continue with the discussion.

The following questions may be helpful:

What does this mean to me?

How does it make me feel?

Did I find the text disturbing/hopeful/confusing?

What images of God emerge for me?

What do I think that God is saying in this text?

What impact does this have on my life?

Scripture and Catechism Resources

Grace:

Ex.17:1-7	God commands Moses to draw water from the rock to quench the Israelites' thirst.
Dt. 7:6-8	God chose the Israelites out of love, not because they were important.
Ez. 36:22-31	God will cleanse the Israelites and give an abundance of his favours.
Jn. 1:12-13	Who receives and believes in Jesus receives the power to become God's children.
Jn. 1:16-17	We receive the superabundance of grace and truth from Jesus.
Jn. 4:1-42	Jesus promises the woman at the well living water.
Jn. 7:37-39	To those who come to him, Jesus promises living water, that is, the Holy Spirit.
Jn. 15:1-5	We, the branches, cannot bear fruit unless we abide in Jesus, the vine.
Rom 3:21-26	Our justification comes as a gift of God's grace through our redemption in Jesus.
Rom 5:2-5	Through Jesus we gain grace; through the Holy Spirit, we receive God's love.
Rom 12:4-8	Our different gifts for serving the Body of Christ come from God's grace.
2 Cor 12:7-10	God's power is perfected in our weaknesses, and his grace is enough.
Eph 1:5-8	The effects of grace, freely given to us by God.
Eph. 2:1-10	God's grace, which has given us life, is his own free gift of love, unearned by us.
2 Tim. 1:9	We are called to be holy not because we earned it but because of God's grace.
2 Pt. 1:3-4	God has called us to everlasting life and to partake of his own nature.

Sacramental Living

Ex. 12:1-27	As a sign of fidelity, God institutes the Passover as a perpetual ritual among the Israelites.
Ex. 16:1-15	God sustains the Israelites with manna, providing for their needs daily by that special bread.
Ex. 31:13-14	Keeping the sabbath is a sign of sanctification and profaning it leads to death.
Lv. 23:1-44	God establishes a cycle of feasts, celebrated in holy assembly using material signs.
Jn. 6:53-59	Whoever eats Jesus' flesh and drinks his blood will abide in him and live forever.
Jn. 15:4-5	Jesus is the true vine, and we are the branches; we must abide in him to bear fruit.
Eph. 1:20-23	Christ in glory is Head of the Church, his Body, which is the fullness of Christ.
2Tim 3:16-17	Inspired by God, Scripture is our teacher and guide to learn holiness.
2Pt. 1:3-4	God has called us to everlasting life and to partake of his own nature.

Catechism of the Catholic Church - CCC

Grace

1129	There is sacramental grace that is proper to each sacrament.
1742	Grace does not compete with our human freedom, but enhances it.
1810-1811	Grace elevates the human virtues; in Christ, we receive the grace to practice them.
1972	The New Law of the Gospel gives us grace to live it through our faith and the sacraments.
1987-2016	Grace and justification, types of grace and merit.

Sacramental living

1076	The fruits of the Paschal mystery come through the liturgy and sacraments.
1082-1092	How the sacraments communicate the divine blessings and graces of the Trinity.
1113	The sacraments are the focus of the Church's entire liturgical life.
1129	The sacraments are necessary for the salvation of all believers.
1324-1327	The Eucharist is the source, centre, and summit of our sacramental life.
1457-1458	Receiving Holy Communion unworthily and the value of frequent confession.