

The apostle Paul, in today's epistle reading to the Romans, says:

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Rom 10:9).

You may have heard this passage read to you by someone on your doorstep. And you may have been asked if you have accepted Jesus as your personal Savior, and invited to pray, what is often called, the Sinner's Prayer. This prayer consists of admitting that you are a sinner, repenting, putting your faith in Jesus, and accepting Him as your Lord and Savior. There are a number of versions of this prayer, but this is the basic content. Some, however, will go so far as to claim that this, and nothing else, is all that is required to be a Christian and to be saved, and that Catholics believe that they earn salvation by good works.

The repentance of sin, putting one's faith in Jesus and receiving Him as one's Lord and Savior is what we do as

Catholics. This should be an ongoing part of our personal spiritual life. We also do this at every Divine Liturgy, if we sincerely pray the communion prayer. We do this when we go to confession. When we receive His Body and Blood in Holy Communion, we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior in the deepest and most profound way. After all, His Body and Blood are the very means by which He saves us. We are washed in the blood of the Lamb. We do more, however, than believe in Jesus and accept Him as our Divine Savior. In Holy Communion, if we have the right disposition, we give ourselves and our *love* to Him, and He to us.

One of our Byzantine communion hymns, entitled, *In this Holy Mystery*, expresses this most beautifully.

Lord, in this Holy Mystery, we give our love to you, offering our lives completely, humbly in gratitude.

Jesus is, indeed, our Divine Savior. There is no one other, and no other means by which we are saved than Jesus. In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter clearly states,

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Ac 4:12).

But does this mean, that to be saved, we just simply call on the name of Jesus, or just pray the Sinner's Prayer?

Some misinterpret Scripture in this way, and St. Paul, in particular. They set him in opposition to what they mistakenly think is Catholic teaching. Catholics do not earn their salvation by good works or any other means. The Catholic Church, all throughout her history and up to the present day, has never taught that we earn our salvation, but teaches, entirely, the opposite.¹ Catholic teaching is that God always,

and in every case, takes the initiative. There is absolutely nothing that we can do, in and of ourselves, to obtain the grace of salvation. Nevertheless, we must cooperate with this grace. If we pray the Sinner's Prayer, isn't this something that we are doing? Isn't that a good work? Should anyone conclude, then, that by praying this prayer we are saving ourselves?

According to Catholic teaching, we could not pray the Sinner's Prayer, or even call on the Lord's name, except for the grace of God. God always takes the initiative. When we pray, that is, when we turn to God, even in the slightest way, it is always a response to Him; it is always by means of His grace. Jesus said to His disciples,

¹ (e.g., A monk named Pelagius, who lived from 355-420AD taught that there was really no need for grace in the Catholic understand of the word. The human person was created, so as by nature, to be able to avoid sin and enter heaven. St. Augustine wrote

extensively against Pelagius' teaching. Pelagius' teaching condemned by councils and synods, and ultimately, by the Pope).

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide (Jn 15:16).

When the Apostles left everything to follow the Lord, it was in response to His invitation, His calling them. Catholics are not saving themselves or earning their salvation by the things that they do. Rather, they are responding to the grace of God, like the Apostles did, when they responded to Jesus calling them.

Scripture says that, “God wishes everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). But not everyone responds to His invitation, to His grace. Catholics do not save themselves by good works, but by their good works, Catholics are responding to our Lord, to the call of Divine grace. This is also true of everyone who sincerely prays the Sinner’s Prayer”. But this prayer, alone, is not all that the Lord

expects of us. In other words, faith alone is not all that is necessary for our salvation.

There are numerous examples in Scripture where more than faith is required for us to be saved, more than simply praying the Sinner’s Prayer. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus says,

Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who *does the will of my Father* who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.’ (Mt 7:21–23).

Evildoers? Who else would be prophesying in the name of Jesus, casting out demons in His name and doing mighty works in Jesus’ name, but those who deem themselves to be Christians, believers?

And then there is the parable of the sheep and goats. Those who helped the hungry, thirsty, the stranger, the naked

and the sick, they inherit the kingdom of heaven. Those who failed to do these sorts of things, our Lord says to them, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:41).

The parable of the sheep and the goats is not about doing these exact same things to be saved, like checking them off of a list. These good works do not buy or earn salvation. The parable is not about good works; it is about love. Concerning this parable, the Lord says, that whatever you did, even to the least, you did it to me. The result is salvation for some, and damnation for others.

Faith, that is, believing in Jesus and accepting Him as our Savior, is truly good, but it is not enough. We can call on His name, saying, “Lord, Lord”, prophesy, cast out demons and do mighty works in the name of Jesus, but if we fail to love, then, we gain nothing, certainly not our salvation.

Who will enter heaven? In the words of our Savior, Jesus Christ, “...he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (Matt 7:21). And what is the Father’s will, but that we love one another. As it says in the first epistle of John, “He who does not love does not know God; for God is love” (1 Jn 4:8). John also says, “...let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth” (1 Jn 3:18). It is not simply faith alone that is, believing in Jesus, that we are saved. The Apostles James addresses this very question, and it is the only place in the Bible where the phrase, “faith alone” is ever used. James writes:

Some one will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you foolish fellow, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works [...] You see that a man

is justified by works and not by faith alone. [...] For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead (Jas 2:18–26).

James' body-soul analogy perfectly illustrates the relationship between faith and love. Love animates, that is, gives life to faith, like the soul animates, that is, gives life to the body. Without good works, that is to say, acts of love, James says that faith is barren; its lifeless. When a tree is barren, it is not capable of giving fruit. When a land is barren, no one lives there. Apart from good works, that is, acts of love, faith alone cannot save us.

St. Paul says the same thing in his letter to the Galatians, when he writes that it is, "...faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6). The Apostle Peter says,

Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8).

It is not faith that covers a multitude of sins, but love.

And if faith alone was Paul's teaching, why would he admonish the Philippians, saying to them, "...work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

Furthermore, in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul says,

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing (1 Co 13:1–2).

We Catholics believe in Jesus; we accept Him as our Divine Savior, but not just this alone. Faith, for Catholics, in the fullest sense, is more than believing the truths revealed in the Gospel; it is more than faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior, more than trusting in God and hoping in Him. Faith is these things, of course, but the fullness of faith, *living faith*, is "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6). Always remember the words of St. Paul, "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but

have not love, I am nothing". The same is true of good works, in as much as we fail to do them with love. As St. Paul says,

If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing (1 Cor 13:3).

This is the reason that St. Paul concludes his teaching on love by saying,

So, faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love (1 Co 13:13).

Can we begin to see that so-called "works-salvation" is not found anywhere in Catholic doctrine? When we do good works, it is not about the good works in themselves, but the love with which we do these good works. And we do these good works, these acts of love, by the grace of God. It is true that I must believe in Jesus, turn from my sins and repent, and accept Him as my Savior. If, however, this is apart from love, then, I gain nothing. As Catholics, we seek a *living faith*, that is, "...faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). We renew our faith

in Jesus throughout our entire Catholic life. And we renew our hope in His infinite mercy and promises. But above all, we strive to love, not in words, but in deeds. For this is the will of our Father in heaven in which we are saved (Mt 7:21).

Act of Faith

O my God, I firmly believe that You are one God in three Divine Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I believe that Your Divine Son became man, died for our sins, and that He will come to judge the living and the dead. I believe these and all the truths which the holy Catholic Church teaches, because You have revealed them, Who can neither deceive nor be deceived. In this faith I intend to live and die. Amen.

Act of Hope

O my God, relying on Your almighty power, infinite mercy and promises, I hope to obtain pardon for my sins, the help of Your grace, and life everlasting, through the merits of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Redeemer. Amen.

Act of Love

O my God, I love You above all things, with my whole heart and soul, because You are all-good and worthy of all love. I love my neighbor as myself for the love of You. I forgive all who have injured me and ask pardon of all whom I have injured. Amen.