

Fr. Perozich comments —

When I give spiritual direction, I ask the directee 4 questions to stimulate their thinking for the session, the same questions I ask myself during the examen of conscience at Compline (night prayer).

Since the last session,

- 1. What people has God brought into your life during this time;*
- 2. What situations has God allowed you to encounter;*
- 3. How did you let God work through you;*
- 4. How did you get in His way;*

Grace is assented to by an act of faith on the part of the person.

Grace is lived out through cooperation with God, and leads to the final grace of eternal life.

JP Nunez gives a clear explanation that all salvation is a free gift from God alone, grace. So I have no further comment.

How Our Good Works Help Get Us to Heaven

[JP NUNEZ](#)



The question of **how we are saved** is arguably the biggest issue in Catholic-Protestant theological dialogues. Most Protestants believe we are saved by faith alone, but we Catholics believe that we're saved by faith and good works. Now, since both sides agree that faith is part of the equation, these discussions tend to center on the value of good works. In particular, they usually focus on *whether* the New Testament says our works help get us to heaven.

However, in doing so, we sometimes leave out an important piece of the puzzle: *how* our good works can play a role in our salvation. See, both the New Testament and the Catechism are very clear that salvation is not a simple weighing of our good actions against our bad actions, so at first blush, it is not entirely clear how the Catholic view can be correct. For example, take a look at these passages:

“For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:22-24).

“Our justification comes from the grace of God. Grace is *favor*, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life” (Catechism 1996).

From these two texts, it is clear that **salvation is not just a simple weighing of our good acts against our bad acts. Rather, it is the result of God's grace.** It is a gift he freely bestows on us even though we are sinners who do not deserve it, so we cannot earn it or save ourselves. But if that is the case, how can good works play any role in it? If

salvation is all grace, how can there be any room left for our works? That may seem like an unsolvable dilemma, but there is in fact a way out.

God in Us

Take a look at this passage from one of St. Paul's letters:

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure**” (Ephesians 2:12-13).

If we read this text carefully, Paul actually says something pretty remarkable. First, he tells his readers to “work out your own salvation,” so **it is clear that our good works play a role in the process. Salvation isn't just something that happens to us. Instead, we have to contribute to it and “work [it] out.”** However, in the very next clause, Paul qualifies this teaching in a way that resolves the tension between grace and works.

He tells his readers that **they can work out their salvation because “God is at work in you,” and that is the key. When baptized Christians in a state of grace perform good works, they're not just our works. They're God's works. As St. Paul says in another letter, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). And when Jesus lives in us, he also acts in us, moving us to do the good works that get us to heaven.**

The Value of Jesus' Works

So in a very real sense, *our* good works don't get us to heaven. Instead, *Jesus'* works in us get us there, and that is exactly what the Church teaches:

"The charity of Christ is the source in us of all our merits before God. Grace, by uniting us to Christ in active love, ensures the supernatural quality of our acts and consequently their merit before God and before men. The saints have always had a lively awareness that their merits were pure grace" (Catechism 2011).

If you think about it, this makes perfect sense. If Jesus acts in us, how could those works not get us to heaven? The whole point of Christianity is that Jesus won salvation for us on the cross, so it stands to reason that if he now works in us, those acts would have saving value as well.

Being Conformed to Christ

Or think of it another way. Heaven isn't just a really nice place that God can more or less arbitrarily choose to let people into or not. No, heaven is a state of complete union with God. It is a sharing in his very nature (2 Peter 1:4), which is love (1 John 4:8, 16), so it is a full incorporation into the communion of perfect love that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have with one another.

In other words, it is the state of finally being perfected (Hebrews 12:23) and conformed to Jesus Christ (Romans 8:29), and when we look at it from that angle, it becomes even clearer that Jesus' good works in us have the power to save us and get us to heaven. If he is working in us, then those works are going to conform us to him pretty much by definition. Likewise, as God, Jesus is perfect love itself, so once again, if he is working in us, then of course we are going to become more perfect and deepen our communion of love with God.

Admittedly, this resolution of the tension between grace and works just leads to another tension: if Jesus works in us, how can they truly be our works? That is one of the big mysteries that theologians have been trying to figure out for two millennia, and I am not even going to try to answer it here. Suffice it to say, much like the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the Eucharist, this is a mystery that we can't fully wrap our heads around, but it is clearly taught in Scripture. St. Paul clearly tells us that our good works get us to heaven because they're actually Jesus' works in us, so even though salvation is a gift of God's grace, we still need to put in the effort to work it out with fear and trembling.

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