

Grace

Grace is, first and foremost, the free and undeserved gift of God—the presence and life of the Holy Spirit given to us. Through grace we are justified and sanctified; we are drawn into right relationship with God and continually shaped into the likeness of Christ. Grace is never something we achieve or earn. It is always God’s initiative, God’s generosity, and God’s invitation into communion.

Grace, however, is not only given for our own sake. The Holy Spirit also gives gifts that draw us into God’s ongoing work in the world. By grace we are strengthened and equipped to participate in the mission of Christ: the salvation of others and the building up of the Church, the Body of Christ.

Within the sacramental life of the Church, we speak of sacramental graces—those specific gifts that flow from each of the sacraments. Each sacrament not only celebrates what God is doing, but actually gives the grace needed to live what it celebrates. The Church also speaks of special graces, or *charisms*. The word *charism* comes from the Greek *charisma*, meaning a freely given gift or favor. St. Paul uses this language to describe the many and varied gifts of the Spirit given to the faithful for the good of the community.

Some of these charisms are quiet and ordinary; others may be more visible or even extraordinary, such as healing, miracles, or speaking in tongues. But all authentic charisms share a common purpose: they flow from grace and lead back to grace, always serving the building up of the Church and the good of others.

Grace, then, is never meant to remain private. It is always both personal and communal. It draws us into deeper union with God and sends us outward in love and service. In this way, grace builds up the Church and continues the work of Christ in the world.