

Homily.2AdventB.12.10.23
St. Bernard Church
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THE POWER OF GRACE

Since Advent is a time to prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, it might be appropriate to reflect this morning on the mission, the fundamental purpose, of Jesus Christ when He came to earth.

Jesus had two fundamental goals for His incarnation.

The first is salvation. None of us, with the best lawyer on earth, can successfully argue that, upon our death, we deserve as a matter of justice to enjoy eternal bliss with God, the angels and the saints in heaven. Through His suffering and death, it is Jesus that has opened the doors to heaven for us. Our salvation is a function of His grace. We just have to accept it and cooperate with it.

The second main goal of Jesus is our sanctification. The Bible tells us that He established a kingdom on earth to make His divine nature, His divine life, available to all of humanity. He wants us to be constantly growing in holiness, taking on the characteristics of His own life.

So the Bible is filled with references of Jesus to the life He offers us. Here are just a few examples.

1 John 4: "God sent His only Son into the world so that we might have life through Him."

John 10: "I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly."

Revelation 3: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, then I will enter His house and dine with him, and he with Me."

To help us live the life He wants for us, to help us grow in holiness, Jesus offers us His grace, His divine, supernatural power. But we have to open the door.

Here are a few good questions for us to reflect on this morning and in the time we have before Christmas: Am I experiencing the grace of Jesus in my life? Do I believe that grace is real? When do I expect to receive grace?

Grace can be defined as the life of God communicated freely to humanity and accepted by us through faith. (REPEAT)

The Catholic Catechism defines grace this way: "The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it."

In 1 Timothy 2, we are told that Jesus “saved us and called us to a holy life...according to his own design and the grace bestowed on us in Christ Jesus.”

Grace is a supernatural power. Amazing and always available.

St. Paul, in his 2nd Letter to Timothy, says that “God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control.”

How does this power work? I’ll give you one example, an example that made a dramatic change in my life.

In 2 Corinthians 12, St. Paul writes that, so that he might not become too proud of his accomplishments, what he called “a thorn in the flesh” was sent to him, to keep him humble. He says that he begged three times that this thorn would be taken from him, and God responded by telling Paul “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

Paul responds to God’s words by saying that now he “will boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me.” He concludes the passage with these words: “Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and constraints, for the sake of Christ, for when I am weak, then I am strong.” I would add “Strong with God’s strength, not my own.”

What this means for each of us is that if God wants us to do something, we can never say no out of a sense of personal inadequacy. If He wants us to do something, He will make up for what we lack with His grace. His power will be made perfect in our weakness.

When I first heard this passage at Mass, it meant a lot to me because, even though most things in my life have gone well, I have always struggled with a sense of inadequacy. I have a small, narrow comfort zone. This passage made me realize that my feelings of inadequacy made room for God’s grace to be more active in my life.

So now I couldn’t be happier with my low self-esteem.

I want to close with a list of ways that we are changed by God’s grace.

- We become more willing, more generous in serving others.
- We become more humble, realizing the truth of Jesus’ words “Without me you can do nothing.”
- We are happier.
- Our life becomes more adventurous.
- We live in and with the Holy Spirit, who guides and empowers us.
- We realize that there are no coincidences in life. All is planned.
- We are conscious of Jesus in every situation, of His presence and the opportunity we have to share Him with others.

- We discover our gifts from the Holy Spirit, our charisms, and put them to work.
- We learn that grace transforms challenges and sufferings into blessings.
- In the eyes of the world, we become more foolish. (Mother Angelica, who founded the EWTN Catholic network, had this saying: “Unless you are willing to do the ridiculous, God will not do the miraculous.”)

Sometimes it helps to have a mantra, a short phrase that we use on a regular basis to help us be sensitive to God’s grace being active in our lives, to realize that we’re in the flow of God’s grace all the time.

So here’s a simple prayer that I recommend to you:

“Lord, help me remember that I am in the flow of your grace every moment of the day.”