

If we put all this together we realise that our salvation means we are able to share in **the life of the Trinity** (Eph.2:18) - reconciled to the Father (2 Cor.18), part of the Son's body, infused with the love and power of the Holy Spirit. This is what is meant by us becoming **sons** of God, his **adopted** children (Rm.8:14-16, Gal.4:5).

These claims are so wonderful it is almost impossible to believe them - we know that in reality we do not generally **feel** this intimate closeness to God, though we may well be blest with occasional glimpses of it. Although as human beings our emotions are very important to us, still we must realise that what is happening within us is not by any means an emotional change but a **transformation** in our very being, our whole character (2 Cor.3:18, Phil.3:21).

God's grace will change us into a new creation (2 Cor.5:17) if we allow it to, by using our free-will to cooperate with his grace. The more and more we give this cooperation we will become **virtuous people** - this means that instead of having an inclination to sin which is the result of Original Sin, we will instead have an automatic inclination **to do good**. We will actually, and not theoretically, be different from other people who do not enjoy God's grace. And we must never forget that the best way to receive God's grace, to participate in the Trinitarian life and to be transformed, is by frequent reception of Jesus in **the Eucharist**. Again, when we receive Holy Communion we do not always **feel** the emotion we normally associate with doing something exciting, but it is without doubt the most beneficial gift we can do receive on earth. If everyone **really** accepted what the Eucharist is, then there would be queues to get into Church every day to receive it.

Our Life in Jesus and the Spirit gives us specific gifts to enable us to grow closer to God, to become more and more virtuous. St. Paul writes several times about the practical gifts we receive: "**There are many gifts but the same Spirit .. wisdom .. knowledge .. healing .. miracles .. prophecy .. discernment of spirits .. tongues**" (1 Cor.12, Rm.12), but of far greater importance are the spiritual gifts "**Faith, Hope and Love, the greatest of these is Love**" (1 Cor.13). These are called the Theological virtues because they are the basis of our life in Jesus (1 Cor.13) - they guarantee a living faith in the revealed truths, a humble, child-like reliance on God, and the ability to love God "**with all our hearts , with all our souls, and with all our strength**" (Deut 6 and Jesus' words Mk.12) and so, in turn, we will be able to "**love our neighbour as ourselves**". These virtues have a prime effect on our personality "**The fruits of the Spirit are joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trust, gentleness, and self control**" (Gal.5:22).

Closely associated with the Theological virtues are the Cardinal virtues, the fruits of Wisdom (Ws.8:7): Prudence (to know what is the right thing to do), Justice (to seek goodness and equality), Fortitude (to overcome fear and be strong in the face of difficulties), and Temperance (to live a Christian life of moderation like Jesus).

## Our Catholic Faith

### 13. Salvation Through Jesus Christ

#### *Part 2 - A New Life in Christ*



#### Questions for Reflection

1. What does being 'righteous' before God mean?
2. What is Sanctifying Grace?
3. Is a Christian really different from anyone else?

## What is Meant by Justification?

Justification just means being righteous before God or being acceptable to him. In terms of Christian understanding, it refers to the state of being reconciled to God after the first sin of Adam and despite any personal sins we may have committed.

St. Paul states clearly that we become justified before God through our faith in Jesus and not through doing what the Law tells us to do **“God ..justifies everyone who has faith in Jesus ..on what basis.. that only actions count? No, that faith is what counts. A person is justified by faith, not by doing what the Law tells him to do”** (Rm.3:26-28). This faith is formally expressed by a person being baptised (Rm.6).



This classic understanding is one upon which Martin Luther and other Reformers based their theology in parting company with the Catholic Church, because they thought that the latter taught the primacy of good works as in the letter of James (2:14f) **“Show me your faith without good deeds, but it is by my deeds that I show you my faith ..by deeds and not only by believing someone is justified”**

In reality, there is **no** such conflict, except one of language or perspective. Really, **we are justified** not by faith or works but **by God’s grace**. God’s grace is a free gift from him to humanity (Rm.3:24). Therefore, on this basis nothing anyone can do, no matter how great, could demand that God accepts them as righteous before him. God **chooses** to do this for those he has preordained (Rm.8: 28-30).

However, this is not an absolute justification, it has to be maintained by carrying out the great command of Jesus **“Love one another as I have loved you”** (Jn.15:12). It is this truth that St. James is emphasising and St. Paul would not disagree with him: **“the only thing you should owe to anyone is love for one another”** (Rm.13:8f) and **“Give every part of your body to God as instruments of uprightness and then sin will no longer have power over you”** (Rm.6:13).

The other aspect of Justification that caused controversy between Luther and the Catholic Church was how justification **actually works**. Luther saw it as a **legal** declaration whereby the merits of Christ’s saving death were only **imputed** to man, that is, they removed the guilt of man’s sin from God’s eyes without actually effecting change in man **on the inside**. Luther believed man was both righteous and sinner only in the sense that a sick person receiving medicine could get better but was still actually sick.

In contrast to Luther, the Catholic Church has a much more beautiful view of Justification - man not only has the guilt of sin removed but there is **also an actual change** made to his inner self i.e. Christ’s merits are **imparted** not just imputed to him. This is described as being filled with the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, a state that really does **make a person holy** in the eyes of God.

## What is the Difference between Justification and What Jesus Achieved by his Death?



Jesus’ death saved us from sin in two ways:

**First**, he removed the effects of the first sin so that we could now return to part of the state of Original Righteousness lost by ‘Adam’. Remember, in previously considering the fate of the Just before Jesus, it was concluded that this means that we return to such a condition of closeness or holiness to God that if we were to die we would be united with him in Heaven. However, that other aspect of Original Righteousness, the disinclination to sin, was not restored and so we were still left with the tendency to sin called concupiscence inherited from ‘Adam’. However, Jesus’ death did not bestow Justification automatically on people. This only occurs for those who respond to God’s grace with faith in Jesus, and many would not do so (Phil.3:18-20), **and** it can be lost again by subsequent serious sin.

**Second**, although we may return to sin and potentially lose that ability to be united with God when we die, Jesus’ death **also** has the extremely important effect that we may also be forgiven those **subsequent** sins and so have our righteousness restored once again. This is what is meant by Jesus’ dying for **our** sins. His death removes the effects of **all** sins provided there is a genuine turning back to God.

So, now it is easy to see that Justification means our **initial** acceptance in faith of Jesus and the **immediate** righteousness and sanctification it brings. Jesus’ death makes this possible, that is why he is Our Saviour. But his death goes much, much **further**. It gives the assurance, in his stunning act of love, that we may return to God at any time if we have genuine repentance for any **subsequent** sins.

## What is Meant by a Life in Christ?

So far, the benefits of Jesus’ death in respect of **sin** have been explained, but there are, in fact, a **multiplicity of other benefits** bestowed on us as Christians while we remain in a state of righteousness with God.

First and foremost, no matter how difficult it is to appreciate this truth, we have actually **entered into** a new life with God. We are filled with the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit **“because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us”** (Rm.5:5) and **“You, however, live not by your natural inclinations but by the Spirit since the Spirit of God has made a home in you .. will give life to your own mortal bodies by the Spirit living in you”** (Rm. 8:9). That is what is meant by **“Our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit”** (1 Cor.6:19). The proof that Christ remains in us is the Spirit he has given us (1 Jn.3:24 and 4:13). The nature of what we have been offered is also expressed by St. Paul in the incredible terms of actually being **incorporated** into the Body of Christ (1.Cor.12, Rm.12, Eph.1, Col.1).