

Take-Home Four

Justification

Abide

The Eucharist, Grace, and Staying in Christ

What We Found

We started by conceding everything, because everything is true. Justified by his grace as a gift. Not by works of the law. By grace you have been saved through faith, not your own doing, the gift of God, not because of works, lest any man should boast. A Catholic can say all of that warmly and without hedging, and should.

The Church settled this long before it was raised. At the Second Council of Orange in 529 she condemned the idea that anyone can take the first step toward God under his own power, and taught that even the beginning of faith is grace.

And we read the two verses that sit beside the famous ones and almost never get read with them. Romans 2:13 says it is the doers of the law who will be justified. Ephesians 2:10, one sentence after the verse everyone quotes, says we are created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

St. Clement of Rome

Letter to the Corinthians, chs. 32-33 (summary)

Around the year 96 he writes that we are not justified through ourselves or our own works but through faith. Then, in the same breath, he asks whether we should therefore give up good works, and says emphatically that we must not.

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

On Grace and Free Will (summary)

Grace precedes every good movement of the will. God works in us both to will and to do, and our freedom is not destroyed by grace but healed by it.

Voice of the Church

St. John Chrysostom

Homilies on Romans (summary)

The sinner is justified apart from anything he brought, and that is precisely why he must now live differently. Chrysostom uses grace to raise the stakes of the moral life, not to lower them.

Ready Response

“Catholics think you earn heaven.” You have been accused of holding something you do not hold, so treat it as a misunderstanding to clear up rather than a fight to win. Quote your own side and let it do the work. CCC 2010: no one can merit the initial grace of conversion. CCC 2007: with regard to God, there is no strict right to any merit on the part of man. Then mention the Second Council of Orange in 529, which condemned the claim that anyone can take the first step toward God under his own power, and taught that even the beginning of faith is grace.

“Then why talk about merit at all?” Because Scripture does, and you did not choose the vocabulary. Christ promises reward again and again, and that language has to go somewhere. If you want one sentence to carry it, St. Augustine wrote it already: when God crowns our merits he is crowning his own gifts (Letter 194, to Sixtus).

“Ephesians 2 says not by works.” Agree completely, and say the verse with them rather than after them; you have been saying it out loud all week as a statement about yourself. Then ask whether you can keep going to the end of the passage, and read verse 10 together. It is one page and ten seconds, and your friend can see it for themselves.

Live It This Week

- Read Romans 2, 3, and 4 in one sitting, in order, without commentary.
- Say Ephesians 2:8-9 out loud once a day as a statement about yourself.
- Learn what the Second Council of Orange condemned.
- Keep praying for your person by name.

Memory Verse

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.” **Ephesians 2:8**

Before Next Session

Read: Genesis 22:1-18. Bring your sealed envelope. Do not open it.

Catechism: CCC 1987-1995, 2007-2011. If you read only one, read 2008.