

✠ James 2:14-26 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

You are saved by grace. The grace and mercy of God is what saves you. The Son of God did not have to humble Himself to be born of a virgin, submitting Himself to the pains and woes of this life. He did not have to suffer and die on the cross. But because God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, He sent His Son to save mankind from his sin. You are saved by grace.

Believing this – that you are saved by grace – is what it means to have faith. That is all faith is: believing that you are saved by the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Faith is nothing more and nothing less. If you do not believe that you are saved by grace but that you are saved by something else or that you do not need salvation, then you have no faith and you remain in your sin. That is why the apostle writes, “You are saved by grace through faith.”

The stronger your faith is, the more you believe that you are saved by grace. But stronger faith does not make you more saved than someone of weaker faith. The grace of God is not poured out in proportion to your faith, rather, your cup runneth over. You drown in the grace of God. And if you think your faith is strong, then you are weak. Because if you think your faith is strong then you depend not upon the grace of God for salvation but rather upon your faith. Nothing can take the grace of God from you; He gives without measure and without regard to person. So God’s grace never goes away. But your faith can be shipwrecked and lost.

And the quickest way to shipwreck your faith is to think that your faith is strong and fortified. Then the devil has a much easier time of tempting you to think that you do not need to hear preaching or God’s Word; that you do not need the saving body and blood of Christ, that Baptism is your idea and pledge to God rather than His pledge to you. Thus Peter, thinking his faith strong, fell by trying to keep the Lord from the cross. And Jesus’ response to this man of great faith? “Get behind me Satan, you have not the things of God in mind but the things of man.”

So instead of thinking that our faith is strong, that we have solid faith and can move mountains with our faith, we should rather depend upon the grace of God and believe His Word that He loves us and saves us and keeps us in the shelter of His wing. Then we will do the things of faith and our works will show our faith. You have faith? Good, demonstrate it by your works. For faith without works is dead.

Works do not save you. You cannot earn your way into God’s good graces. In fact, you cannot earn faith. Both God’s grace and your faith are a gift from God. You believe because He has given you His Spirit. You did not believe before He gave to you His Spirit. As it is written, “He gave us His Spirit by whom we cry out, ‘Abba Father’.”

The grace of God saves you by atoning for your sins by the death and resurrection of Jesus and by giving you the faith to believe this. This faith will be demonstrated in your works. And if you do not believe, then your works will show that too. Take our father, Abraham; was he not justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? What if Abraham had said to God, “I believe you, that you will make me a great nation through Isaac, and because I believe you I will not do as you say and sacrifice him.” It would have been clear that Abraham

did not believe God. And he would not have been counted as righteous. But instead Abraham believed God, sacrificed Isaac, and was counted as righteous and called a friend of God.

So the question remains: what works demonstrate that we believe that we are saved by the grace of God in Christ Jesus? Is caring for your neighbor a work evidencing faith? Perhaps. But even the pagan can care for his neighbor. How about joining anti-abortion rallies and pickets? Certainly. But there is a group of atheists called, "Atheists for Life" that will stand next to you in the picket line. What about reading the Bible. Most assuredly. Reading the Bible is certainly a work that evidences faith. But then, many non-Christians read the Bible daily for advice on marriage and money or how to raise a child, or simply to learn English. What about going to church? Of course. But there are many who go to church and do not believe.

The doing of any of these works could certainly demonstrate faith, but they do not necessarily demonstrate faith. If they necessarily demonstrated faith then if we did not do them we would have no faith. There is no work that necessarily demonstrates our faith. Thus there is no work that is necessary.

But there are a few things that are more evidentiary than others. Saying the creed, for example. Who but one who believes that the grace of God saves him would say, "I believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost"? Who but one who believes Jesus' words and promise would partake of the Sacrament of the Altar? Who but one who believes Jesus' words and promise would pray the Our Father? And who except one who believed himself forgiven for the sake of Christ would come and confess his sins? These works evidence faith better than all the good works of charities and halfway homes. These are the works akin to Abraham depending upon the grace and promise of God in sacrificing Isaac. Who but one who has faith would do such things?

Yet these are the very things that are neglected and side-tabled by all too many Christians. How many Christians don't call their pastor to come and bring God's Word and Sacrament when they are hospitalized and ill? Instead they just want to be left alone. Why wouldn't you want to hear God's Word and receive His life-giving body and blood all the time? And especially when you are sick and suffering?

But being friendly and non-confrontational has become far more important than the Sacrament and hearing God's Word and confessing our sins. Too many Christians say that they don't need those things to be Christian when our Lord, by giving them, has said quite the opposite. Far too many Christians depend upon their faith to save them rather than upon the grace of God in Christ. This is evidence by their works of not attending the Sacrament, not hearing God's Word, not participation in the worship of the saints, or at least by not thinking these things important and necessary.

Faith without works is dead. But the only works that matter are those given to us by God in Christ. Hear my words; be baptized; eat and drink my body and blood; confess your sins; repent; pray; care for the poor. Do none of these things because your faith is strong and you are a good Christian. Do them because you believe that you are saved by the grace of God in Christ Jesus. Then you will see that a person is justified by works complimenting and completing faith.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠