



John Paul the Great Catholic University

MERITORIOUS ACTS OF FAITH



FAITH AND THE SALVIFIC MERIT OF GOOD WORKS

Trinity Do

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Christ Washing the Disciples' Feet, Ford Madox Brown, 1852.

TRINITY DO

Meritorious Acts of Faith

Faith and the Salvific Merit of Good Works

Introduction

The relationship between faith and good works has been a central question in Christian theology. Certain acts of kindness, justice, and charity are recognized through most cultures as good works, but good works become truly meritorious through our Christian faith. Faith allows good deeds to become salvific and therefore distinct from actions that are merely “good” in a general sense. These actions become aligned with God’s plan to transform each life towards His will, which in turn allows good works to become genuine expressions of faith rather than sole human achievements. In the absence of faith, we cannot be certain that the performance of good works brings eternal life. Goodness does not necessarily require faith, but having faith allows good works to be salvifically meritorious, life-giving, and genuinely pure; therefore, the extension of faith infuses good works with the divine purpose God has gifted us to participate in.

Why God?

Why do Christians choose to believe in God as the One with whom we align all of our good works? We choose to follow God because He is the source of all goodness and He creates us with the inherent desire to reflect His characteristics. Because God is perfection itself, He is the absolute foundation and measurement of all goodness.¹ Unlike humans who have traits of goodness, God’s nature is goodness. He is the law, defining what the law is through His nature. For example, the sun does not merely possess light, but it is the source of light. If you step into the shade, you lose that light, but the sun remains bright. God is the source of all good things we experience, like a ray of light coming from the sun. Thus, when in fellowship with God, our understanding of morality is rooted in the ultimate source of goodness. All morality comes from the understanding that there is a

perfect and good moral example to follow. God is the example by which goodness is measured, and from whom our understanding of morality is derived.

As Christians, we are dependent upon God as the Creator of the universe; therefore, He is owed the obedience of our will. God alone is the ultimate source of everything that exists without limitations or measurements.² Humans are contingent beings that rely on external causes for their existence. Existence requires a creator who causes all creatures to exist. This source must be outside all things that are contingent and must be the essence of existence itself. God is that necessary being because He can exist on His own and cannot fail to exist. Since God maintains creation in this way, His moral instruction deserves our fidelity.

What is Needed for Goodness To Exist

It is important to be rooted in faith to prevent a false interpretation of goodness. For example, someone could say that appealing to their sexual desires as a primary moral guide is “good” because they are obeying a natural desire that leads to temporal happiness. But even a very brief consideration of sexual assault and abuse reveals that the subjective desires of fallen human nature cannot serve as an infallible guide to what is truly good. This illustrates the concept of a corrupted human nature, which shows that our internal compasses are skewed and cannot be self-authenticating. If goodness was purely subjective, then any and all actions are permissible as long as they cause happiness for the individual person, which Saint Paul warns us against in Galatians, when he explains that indulging in fleshly desires will separate us from the Kingdom of God.³

Objectively speaking, our works ought to pursue true goodness. Saint Thomas Aquinas defines the “good” as things that are desirable as they are perfect in a natural act of being.⁴ An object or act is good for an agent if it

¹ It is known to refer to God analogically to clarify the difference between wording being used. When we refer to God analogically we consider Him in a different bracket from our understanding of the word.

² Measurement implies there is a limitation to the objects being measured. Many describe God as infinite because He cannot be measured. God doesn’t have goodness since He is the ultimate source by which all standards are measured, which means He is the perfect example of goodness for us to follow.

³ Galatians 5:19-21; 21-24, revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (used hereafter unless stated otherwise). Saint Paul lists fleshly desires that he considers to be evils because of their consequences. He then lists fruits of the Holy Spirit talking about how Christ died for those fleshly desires, thus reforming them to lead towards virtue.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2nd rev. ed., online ed., ed. Kevin Knight (New Advent, 2017), I, q. 5, a. 1, newadvent.org.

aids in realizing that agent's proper end or purpose. These goods are meant to help virtues flourish, ultimately transforming ourselves to more Christ-centered living. The Good is considered when it's declared to be without qualification, meaning there is value within itself, viewing it as an absolute being with intrinsic goodness.

In *De Gratia*, Saint Augustine writes about the source of good works.⁵ He emphasizes the importance of acknowledging that meritorious works are rooted in God, rather than ourselves. True goodness cannot come from a displaced foundation; if we choose to not follow God then we are shutting ourselves away from that grace. Our acceptance of His grace, opens the doors for Him to shape our desires, thoughts, and actions.

It is through faith that our good works are made in acts of love rather than other unfulfilling factors, like fear. No one enjoys a friendship that feels forced or one-sided because of the underlying knowledge that there is no reality or security in that friendship. John writes about God's love as the foundation of His relationship with humanity.⁶ Once again reaffirming that it is through His being of love, humanity is able to love one another.⁷ Those who are in perfect fellowship with Christ do not need to fear punishment.

Faith is a personal response to God's love through its trust and obedience to God.⁸ Through the ongoing help of God's grace, faith becomes the Christian's intentional choice to believe and follow God, which allows the transformation of the soul. Thus, the Lord becomes the center piece of our lives, as we live in His goodness and mercy. The transformation we receive from grace allows us to view circumstances through the lens of faith, granting us the ability to become part of God's righteousness.⁹

Union with God, Transforming Gift of Grace

The Catholic Church teaches two main principles related to the salvific merits of good works: salvation is not attained through a simple acknowledgment of God, nor is

it attained through good works alone.¹⁰ Our true salvific faith starts as an unearned gift from God, and we are called to respond diligently. It is through the use of our gift that the soul is spiritually transformed, allowing a greater unification with God.

Unification with God is most known through the works of the Holy Spirit as His saving power is spirituality united with Christ. Unity with Christ is not one part of redemption, but instead it is every aspect of how salvation flows in us. A great example of this would be boarding a plane. In order to arrive at your destination, you must be within the plane because whatever happens to the plane happens to us. Just as what is true of Christ becomes true to us, we are closely tied to Christ's characteristics showing how His life is credited towards us.¹¹

In Romans, Paul writes about the problem of relying on good works alone because it is a rejection of God's righteousness.¹² Paul explains that pursuing justification through works alone bypasses the grace of God. Good works without faith, often are intended to earn the approval of others in pridefulness. Creating an underlying desire to maintain control over God. For denying God's definition of righteousness, denies God. Straying away from the definition of Goodness, therefore away from good works.

Saint Paul once again writes to remind the Romans stating: "it is not you that supports the root, but the root that supports you."¹³ Distinguishing how true goodness is measured by how closely aligned it is to God's grace. The foundational structure of faith must be rooted in the objective truth in order to sprout into a fruitful tree.¹⁴ Christ becomes our co-laborer through His grace, encouraging a continuous growth away from sin, while His divine grace works alongside human agency to influence those to choose the path of righteousness.

Grace allows us to be cleansed, which provides our fallen nature with restoration so we can decide to live within the Spirit.¹⁵ Through unification with Christ, we become one flesh for "whoever is united with the Lord is

⁵ Saint Augustine of Hippo, "De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio", in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 5*, Philip Schaffer ed., Kevin Kight ed., rev., (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), Chapter 13. "No man ought, even when he begins to possess good merits, to attribute them to himself, but to God... Forsake me not, he shows that if he were to be forsaken he is unable of himself to do any good thing."

⁶ 1 John 4:11-12, 19:

⁷ 1 John 4:18. True and pure love triumphs fear. He emphasizes how love is the perfect opponent against those driven by fear because true perfect love cannot be effected.

⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (Holy See: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, November 18, 1965), 5. Defines how full submission to God reveals to us true morality through His nature: "man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering 'the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals,' and freely assenting to the truth revealed by him."

⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:20-21. Partaking in His righteousness means for us to become tools of God's proclamation as we offer ourselves to do His works.

¹⁰ We are assured through Scripture that salvation is within our reach, but cannot have an infallible certitude of our salvation because of self-deception and sin. Salvation can be lost through mortal sin, which are by nature grave sins. Self-deception can be done through demonic misleadings.

¹¹ Romans 3: 23-25.

¹² Romans 10:3-4. They lacked the understanding of God's righteousness leading them to create their own standards of righteousness claiming God's law.

¹³ Romans 11:18.

¹⁴ Matthew 13. As it is written in the parable of the Sower, those planted into good soils must yield to God's teachings, allowing abundant spiritual growth. Saint Paul's Letter to Titus speaks about good deeds as natural virtues of unification with Christ, instead of merits of ourselves. Through unification our unholiness is overtaken through Christ's righteousness since He transforms us to be justified by faith, accompanied with grace.

¹⁵ Ezekiel 36. God sprinkles clean water on them to wash away their spiritual filth and idols. He removes their hard, lifeless "heart of stone" and gives them a soft, living "heart of flesh".

one with Him in spirit.”¹⁶ The gift of cleanliness reworks our conviction to go against our fleshly desires, thus causing an abundant call to action rooted in God’s righteousness; naturally leading us towards salvation.

Faith is The Tree, Works are The Fruits

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines faith as a theological virtue: “by faith ‘man freely commits his entire self to God.’”¹⁷ Faith is more than a one-off term and agreement, it is a theological virtue which we believe in God and everything He has revealed to us, rooted in the fact that God is truth itself. The Catholic Church teaches salvation is an unmerited gift of God’s grace. However, this grace must be accepted through living a faith filled life which is expressed through our everyday actions.

Genuine faith must be actively expressed through love and obedience towards God. Catholics believe that faith and good works are inseparable; faith without works, and vice versa, are non-meritorious. Rejecting the concept of buying a way into heaven, but rather reaffirms good works as the fruit of God’s grace.

Salvation is both a free human act and a supernatural gift from God. Faith allows us into the grace of God, but it is through active participation that we are in cooperation with God.¹⁸ For example, if we are given a gift, but did nothing to receive this gift, nor use it,¹⁹ then the gift is wasted and cannot reach its full potential. Faith allows the Holy Spirit to guide us through righteousness, and therefore our salvation.

Faith is an unseen gift which calls us to live life faithfully. These works are only meritorious because of the unearned gift of grace, thus completing our faith. Saint Paul writes that if faith alone was the path to salvation, then he would not emphasize the need to keep the law, through his letters.²⁰

Since faith alone does not sanctify the sinner, it is through our spiritual journey where we become united

with God and therefore the works of the Holy Spirit.²¹ Through this journey grace redefines us as the righteousness of God so that we are able to do meritorious works. Therefore, the fruits of The Holy Spirit allow good works to merit salvation. Ultimately leading us towards unity with God and His divine purpose.

Conclusion

What determines goodness is derived from the foundation of Christian, which is oneness with God. Oneness with God requires the allowance of grace to work through us. Faith allows us the choice to choose God’s will, which is accompanied by God’s grace to transform our bodily desires into the desires of God. Through faith we are able to say good works are rooted in love for the other person rather than ourselves. As one tree is deeply rooted in God, the branches reach the seeds in the ground, dripping onto them the sap produced from the tree. Genuine good works are produced from a unification with God, thus becoming an extension of goodness. Exploring how good works are the result of unification with God and how good works can bring eternal life and merit.

The divine purpose God has gifted us to participate in is called to prevent a decrease of youth within the Church. In order to do that, we must ensure the education they receive is in fulfillment of the Sacraments. The Sacraments teach the importance of working alongside the Holy Spirit, becoming messengers for Christ, and glorifying the divine purpose to experience fellowship with the Creator. As we work alongside the Holy Spirit, the faithful must teach the generations about the duty of participation through their works. Educators are called to teach the faithful the importance of active participation. Thus, strengthening the structural foundations of the Church, and therefore the world.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:17. 1 Corinthians 12:12-14. The gift of faith comes with the movement from the Holy Spirit, calling believers to actions. Our good works become united with Christ because the faithful are His living body.

¹⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Holy See: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Citta del Vaticano 1993), 1814.

¹⁸ Philippians 2:12-13.

¹⁹ Galatians 16-17.

²⁰ In Romans and Galatians, argues that faith does not abolish the

law but upholds it. Paul views the law as holy and good, serving to define sin and point humanity toward the need for a savior. Paul is speaking of a Christian’s initial justification. Our initial justification is not merited by works. Baptism doesn’t excuse bad actions, instead its initial justification is the beginning of sanctification.

²¹ 1 John 4:13. The Holy Spirit is the bridge that pours saving grace into our lives uniting us with God, living in Him.



Christ Washing the Feet of His Disciples, Jacopo Tintoretto, 1548-1549.

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Full Text. Submitted to Prof. Panlasigui, Aug 2026, in partial fulfillment of HUMA491

Introduction

The relationship between faith and good works has been a central question in Christian theology. The merits of works are salvific, and therefore distinct from actions that are merely “good” in a general sense. We make this distinction due to God’s being, as the standard of righteousness, ultimately transcending the human understanding of the true value connected to good works. These actions become aligned with God’s plan to transform each life towards His will, which in turn allows good works to become genuine expressions of faith rather than sole human achievements. In the absence of faith, we cannot be certain that the performance of good works brings eternal life. Goodness does not necessarily require faith, but having faith makes good works to be salvifically meritorious, life-giving, and genuinely pure; therefore, the extension of faith infuses good works with the divine purpose God has gifted us to participate in.

Why God?

Why do Christians choose to believe in God as the One with whom we align all of our good works? We choose to follow God because He is the source of all goodness and He creates us with the inherent desire to reflect His characteristics. Our salvific value of good works cannot be understood purely through the lens of humanity. Christians view good works as natural responses to God’s graces, which in return allows good works to become genuine expressions of faith rather than sole human achievements.

Unlike humans who have traits of goodness, God’s nature is goodness. He does not follow a set of laws which bind Him, but instead He is the law, defining what is the law, through His nature. God doesn’t have goodness since He is the ultimate source by which all standards are measured. Stating that He is the perfect example of goodness, which we all are called to follow. For example, the sun is the source of light compared to having light, because if you step into the shade you lose the light

but the sun remains bright. Just as God is the source of all good things, we experience a ray of light which shines upon us unless we step away from it. Thus, when in fellowship with God, our understanding of morality is rooted in the ultimate source of goodness. Through His nature God is the example of that goodness is measured, and whom our understanding of morality is taken from.

When in fellowship with God, our understanding of morality is rooted in the ultimate source of goodness leading us towards understanding true goodness. Morality is often the common and secular definition of “goodness”. All morality comes from the understanding that there is a perfect and good moral example. Morality in the secular lens is determined through subjective views of goodness, creating many different definitions of morality. Without a definitive source of definition, morality and goodness are often misinterpreted as what is true goodness.

As Christians we are dependent upon God as the Creator of the universe, therefore he is owed the obedience of our will. God alone is the ultimate source of everything that exists without limitations or measurements.¹ Humans are contingent beings that rely on external causes for their existence. The need for existence requires a creator that causes all creatures to exist. This source must be outside all things that are contingent and must be the essence of existence itself. God is that necessary being because He can exist on His own and cannot fail to exist. Since God maintains creation in this way, His moral instruction deserves our fidelity.

What is Needed for Goodness to Exist

Non-Catholics would argue that good works can be done by anyone, with salvific merits because they are considered good deeds within the common people. While good works alone could lead to salvation, it is important to be rooted in faith to prevent a false interpretation of goodness. Non-Catholics argue that goodness and morality are subjective to each individual. For example, someone could say that appealing to their sexual desires as a

¹ Measurement implies there is a limitation to the objects being measured. Many describe God as infinite because He cannot be measured. God doesn’t have goodness since He is the ultimate source by

which all standards are measured, which means He is the perfect example of goodness for us to follow.

primary moral guide is “good” because they are appealing to a natural desire that leads to temporal happiness. But even a very brief consideration of sexual assault and abuse reveals that the subjective desires of fallen human nature cannot serve as an infallible guide to what is truly good. This illustrates the concept of a corrupted human nature, which shows that our internal compasses are skewed and cannot be self-authenticating. If goodness was purely subjective, then any and all actions are permissible as long as they cause happiness for the individual person, which Saint Paul warns us in Galatians, when he explains that indulging in these fleshly desires will separate us from the Kingdom of God.²

Objectively speaking, our works ought to pursue true goodness. Saint Thomas Aquinas defines good as things that are desirable as they are perfect in a natural act of being.³ An object or act is good for an agent if it aids in realizing that agent's proper end or purpose. Humans have virtue and knowledge that must be “perfective” because they fulfill human rational nature. Goods are meant to help virtues flourish, ultimately transforming ourselves to more Christ-centered living. The Good is considered when it's declared to be without qualification, meaning there is value within itself, not requiring others to provide value, viewing it as an absolute being with intrinsic goodness. This objective goodness must participate in the basic perfection of practical existence, which is all created by God.

In *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, Saint Augustine writes about the source of good works. “No man ought, even when he begins to possess good merits, to attribute them to himself, but to God... Forsake me not, he shows that if he were to be forsaken he is unable of himself to do any good thing.”⁴ He emphasizes acknowledging good merits rooted in God, rather than ourselves, because if we choose to not follow God then we are shutting ourselves away from grace. True goodness cannot come from a displaced foundation, if we cut ourselves away from Goodness, Himself then we cannot achieve what is truly good. Our acceptance of His grace, opens the doors for Him to shape our desires, thoughts, and actions.

It is through faith that our good works are done in acts of love rather than other unfulfilling factors, like fear. No one enjoys a friendship that feels forced or one-

sided because of the underlying knowledge there is no reality or security in that friendship. John writes an example about God's love as the foundation of His relationship with humanity⁵: “Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.”⁶ Once again reaffirming that it is through His being of love, humanity is able to love one and other. He emphasizes how love is the perfect opponent against those driven by fear because true perfect love cannot be effected.⁷ Fear is associated with punishment, but with perfect love there is nothing to fear because those who are in perfect faith and fellowship with Christ do not need to fear their punishment. A deep level of love in God leads them away from the fleshly desire to sin.

Faith is a personal response to God's love through trust and obedience to God, where “man entrusts his whole self freely to God, offering ‘the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals,’ and freely assenting to the truth revealed by him.”⁸ Through the ongoing help of God's grace, faith becomes the Christian's intentional choice to believe and follow God, which allows the transformative of the soul. Grandly increasing our desire to be aligned with the Lord's plan. Helping us grows as we learn to trust in His plan more gracefully, let our anxieties fade away, and allow complete trust in the Lord. Thus, allowing the Lord to become the center piece of our lives, living in His goodness and mercy.

The transformation we receive from grace allows us to review circumstances through the lens of faith, granting the ability to become part of God's righteousness.⁹ Partaking in His righteousness leads us to become tools of God's proclamation as we offer ourselves to do His works.

Union with God, Transforming Gift of Grace

The Catholic Church teaches two main principles related to the salvatic merits of good works: salvation is not attained through a simple acknowledgment of God, nor is it attained through good works alone. We are assured, through Scripture, that salvation is within our reach, but cannot have an infallible certitude of our salvation. Our

² Galatians 5:19-21; 21-24. Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (used hereafter unless stated otherwise). Saint Paul lists fleshly desires that he considers to be evils because of their consequences. He then lists fruits of the Holy Spirit talking about how Christ died for those fleshly desires, thus reforming them to lead towards virtue.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2nd rev. ed., online ed., ed. Kevin Knight (New Advent, 2017), I, q. 5, a. 1, newadvent.org.

⁴ Saint Augustine of Hippo, “De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio”, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 5*, Philip Schaffer ed., Kevin Knight ed., rev., (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature

Publishing Co., 1887), Chapter 13.

⁵ 1 John 4:19: “We love because he first loved us.”

⁶ 1 John 4:11-12.

⁷ 1 John 4:18. True and pure love triumphs fear.

⁸ Pope Paul VI, *Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (Holy See: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, November 18, 1965), 5. Defines how full submission to God reveals to us true morality through His nature.

⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:20-21.

true salvific faith starts as an unearned gift from God, therefore we are called to respond diligently. It is through the use of our gift that the soul is spiritually transformed, allowing a greater unification with God.¹⁰

Christ's resurrection represents our spiritual resurrection from the dead, and his death represents our death of sin. In Galatians, Saint Paul writes: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."¹¹ Through His life, death, and resurrection we are given the strength to become truly and literally one body in Christ. To be in Christ means that all the blessings of salvation are generously shared in our union with Him.

Unification with God is known through the works of the Holy Spirit since His saving power is spirituality united with Christ. Unity with Christ is not one part of redemption, but every aspect of how salvation flows in us. Through Jesus' teachings to His disciples, Jesus uses imagery such as the branches stemming from the vine to bear spiritual fruits, to express salvation.¹² A great example of this would be like boarding a plane. In order to arrive at your destination, you must be in the plane because whatever happens to the plane happens to us. Just as what is true of Christ becomes true to us, we are closely tied to Christ showing how His life is credited towards us. "Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith."¹³ Thus, explaining how we are in Christ, who is righteous, which therefore means our righteousness comes from Him.

In Romans, Paul writes about the problem of relying on good works alone because it is a rejection of God's righteousness. Earning salvation only through human efforts stems from a false sense of righteousness. "For being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified."¹⁴ Paul explains to the Romans that pursuing justification through works alone bypasses the grace of God, since He is the ultimate example of Goodness, and therefore good works. Good works without faith, are often intended to

earn the approval of others or achieve a sense of personal fulfillment. Thus, it creates an underlying desire to maintain control over God. This is rooted in pridefulness. By determining the value of good works through the lens of sin, their view is tinted to stray away from God. For denying God's definition of righteousness, is denying God. Straying away from the definition of Goodness, and therefore away from good works.

Saint Paul writes to remind them "it is not you that supports the root, but the root that supports you."¹⁵ He warns against pride and urges us to remember the foundations of our strengths, which are the works of God, rather than our own achievements. Without faith there is a disconnection between us from God's ultimate being of goodness. God's actions establish the definition of what is truly right and loving. Distinguishing how true goodness is measured by how closely aligned it is to God's grace. The foundational structure of faith must be rooted in the objective truth in order to sprout into a fruitful tree. In the parable of the Sower, those planted into good soils must yield to God's teachings, allowing abundant spiritual growth.¹⁶ Thus, Christ becomes our co-laborer through His grace, encouraging a continuous growth away from sin. His divine grace works alongside human agency to influence those to choose the path of righteousness.

Saint Augustine writes how grace is always necessary for our good works to avoid evil characters of sin.¹⁷ "He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life."¹⁸ Saint Paul's Letter to Titus speaks about good deeds that are natural virtues of unification with Christ. Through unification our unholy-ness is overtaken through Christ's righteousness since He transforms us to be justified by faith, which is accompanied with grace.

In the Book of Ezekiel, he prophesied the renewal of Israel speaking about the transformation of nations once they enter in God's holiness. It is through proclaiming His holy name where we allow ourselves to be cleansed by this grace; drawing the line between their sinful natures and those who decide to live within the Spirit.¹⁹ God places His own Spirit into those who

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 1:9-10. Romans 6:4-5; united through death and resurrection.

¹¹ Galatians 2:20.

¹² John 15:1-8.

¹³ Romans 3: 23-25.

¹⁴ Romans 10:3-4. For context, they were trying to obey the law and earn good standing with God through only the law because they were unfaithful to God. They lacked the understanding of God's righteousness leading them to create their own standards of righteousness

claiming God's law.

¹⁵ Romans 11:18.

¹⁶ Matthew 13.

¹⁷ Augustine, *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, Chapter 12. Augustine references to Titus 3:3, which reminds believers of their former, sinful actions before coming to faith.

¹⁸ Titus 3:4-7.

¹⁹ Ezekiel 36. God sprinkles clean water on them to wash away their spiritual filth and idols. He removes their hard, lifeless "heart of stone"

are transformed in order to change their desires and guide them to become the reflection of Christ's life. The gift of faith comes with the movement from the Holy Spirit, calling believers to actions. Our good works become united with Christ because the faithful are His living body.²⁰

Through unification with Christ, we become one flesh for "whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit."²¹ The gift of cleanliness reworks our conviction to go against our fleshly desires, thus causing an abundant call to actions rooted in God's righteousness; naturally leading us towards salvation. Thus faith is when a person freely commits themselves entirely to God. For it is through an active participation where we are living in Christ's body, because without participation faith is considered dead.²²

Faith as the Tree, Works as the Fruits

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines faith as a theological virtue "that we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that the Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself. By faith "man freely commits his entire self to God."²³ Although faith is the doorway to salvation it must be accompanied by works to be alive. Faith is more than a one-off term and agreement, it is a theological virtue which we believe in God and everything He has revealed to us, rooted in the fact that God is truth itself. The Catholic Church teaches salvation is an unmerited gift of God's grace. However, this grace must be accepted through living a faith filled life which is expressed through our everyday actions. Saint James writes:

What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. But some one will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? And

the scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness'; and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.²⁴

Those who believe God is all good, and powerful will obey Him in their calling to meet the needs of others. Genuine faith must be actively expressed through love and obedience towards God. Catholics believe that faith and good works are inseparable; faith without works, and vice versa, is non-meritorious. Since faith is a personal response to God's revelation, the believer naturally seeks to know and do God's will. Rejecting the concept of buying a way into heaven, but rather reaffirming good works as the fruit of God's grace and eternal life. It is through actions influenced by faithfulness of believer where good works are shown to be salvifically merit.

Salvation is both a free human act and a supernatural gift from God. Faith allows us into the grace of God, but it is through active participation where we cooperate with God.²⁵ Salvation is a lifelong process of justifications and sanctifications, where one chooses to do good works with the right intentions. Faith allows us into the Grace of God, but it is the active works of faith that we are in cooperation with God.²⁶ For example, if we are given a gift, but did nothing to receive this gift, nor use it,²⁷ then the gift is wasted and cannot reach its full potential. Faith allows the Holy Spirit to guide us through righteousness, and therefore our salvation. It is through the active use of the gift where fruits can be produced and come to life. Just as the gift of grace is given to us, we must be in cooperation with the Holy Spirit.²⁸ The Holy Spirit guides us through His righteousness, and in correlation the goodness of our works.

Faith is an unseen gift received through the Sacrament of Baptism, where we submit both our intellect and will to God. Baptism calls us to keep strong in our faith by truly living the teachings of the Church; to live faithfully is to do the good works which God has planned. These works are only meritorious because of the unearned gift of grace, thus completing our faith. The Sacraments of the Catholic Church do not require acts of work, concerning salvation, but instead are gifts from God that show us parts of salvation. Saint Paul writes that if faith alone was the path to salvation, then he would

and gives them a soft, living "heart of flesh".

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:12-14.

²¹ 1 Corinthians 6:17.

²² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Holy See: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Citta del Vaticano 1993), 1812. Faith without grace is derived from virtues and fruits, leading acts of goodness to be rooted in vices, such as pride. Taking all actions as separate from God's goodness, therefore being away from goodness.

²³ CCC, 1814.

²⁴ James 2:14-19, 21, 23-24, 26.

²⁵ Philippians 2:12-13.

²⁶ Philippians 2:12-13. Catholics view true faith in collaboration with the other two theological virtues: hope and charity.

²⁷ Galatians 16-17.

²⁸ Galatians 16-17.

not emphasize the need to keep the law, through his letters.²⁹ Paul is speaking of a Christian's initial justification. Our initial justification is not merited by works. Baptism doesn't excuse bad actions, but instead its initial justification is the beginning of sanctification.

It is through our spiritual journey where we become united with God through the works of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the bridge that pours saving grace into our lives uniting us with God, living in Him.³⁰ Through this journey grace redefines us as the righteousness of God so that we are able to do meritorious works. All works made in union with God, therefore they're united with righteousness, and become an extension of goodness. Faith is the tree of which the Holy Spirit takes from to gather the fruits of good works. The fruits of The Holy Spirit which allow good works to be salvifically meritorious, which has always been intended to lead all to God. The Holy Spirit leads us to act in goodness, ultimately leading us towards unity with God and His divine purpose.

Conclusion

What determines goodness is derived from the foundation of Christian, being one with God. Oneness with God requires the allowance of grace to work through us, and transform our personhood. Faith allows us the choice to

choose God's will, which is accompanied by God's grace to transform our bodily desires. Transforming our fleshy desires into desires of the Lord instead, thus rooted all actions within God's righteousness. Through faith we are able to say good works are rooted in love for the other person rather than ourselves, since these good works are rooted in faith, and are life-giving, and genuinely pure. As one tree is deeply rooted in God, the branches reach the seeds in the ground dripping into them the sap produced from the tree. Genuine good works are produced from a unification with God, thus becoming an extension of goodness. Good works can bring eternal life and merit, but with faith it can be assured through scripture they have salvific merit.

The divine purpose God has gifted us to participate in is called to prevent a decrease of faithful youth within the Church. In order to do that we must ensure the education they receive is in fulfillment of the Sacraments. The Sacraments teach the importance of working alongside the Holy Spirit, becoming messengers for Christ. Glorifying the divine purpose to experience fellowship with the Creator. Working alongside the Holy Spirit, the faithful must teach the generations about the duty of active participation. Educators are called to teach the faithful that true belief is demonstrated through action. Thus, strengthening the structural foundations of the Church, and therefore the word.

²⁹ In Romans and Galatians, argues that faith does not abolish the law but upholds it. Paul views the law as holy and good, serving to define sin and point humanity toward the need for a savior.

³⁰ 1 John 4:13. "By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit."

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