

Grace

And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. ~ Acts 20:32

GRACE IS A GIFT FROM GOD — it is the gift of God himself. Because of his great love for us, God gives us this undeserved gift of grace so that we may be able to respond to his call to become children of God and share in the divine nature. Scripture says that God, “*destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through*

his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us” (Eph 1:5-8). This grace, though one and the same reality, namely a participation in the life of God, is traditionally expressed by the following terms: sanctifying grace, sacramental grace, and actual grace.

Sanctifying grace refers to the grace received at Baptism that produces in the soul a permanent supernatural disposition that enables the believer to live ac-

“Grace is a real sharing in and communion with God in the Trinity.”

live ac-



Jesus raising Jairus' daughter from the dead, by Domenico Mastroianni, 1876-1962

ording to the new law of the Gospel. As Scripture says, "if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:17). Literally, this grace brings about a total transformation of the believer that is permanent, and one which gives rise to a "graced" state of being. In this new life, human dispositions and attitudes are perfected, and by the action of the virtues (especially the theological virtues), the believer puts himself at the service of charity and walks by the Spirit. Ultimately, sanctifying grace makes it possible for us to live in Heaven with God.

Although human cooperation and effort is important, the work of sanctification is primarily God's work and involves each person of the Trinity. God the Father designs the plan and sends his Son to bring it about. Jesus fulfills this plan and through the power of the Holy Spirit makes this work of sanctification effective in the Church's sacramental life, beginning with Baptism.

All the sacraments have particular effects according to their individual purpose. The graces flowing from the sacraments are called **sacramental graces** to distinguish them from the other graces (actual

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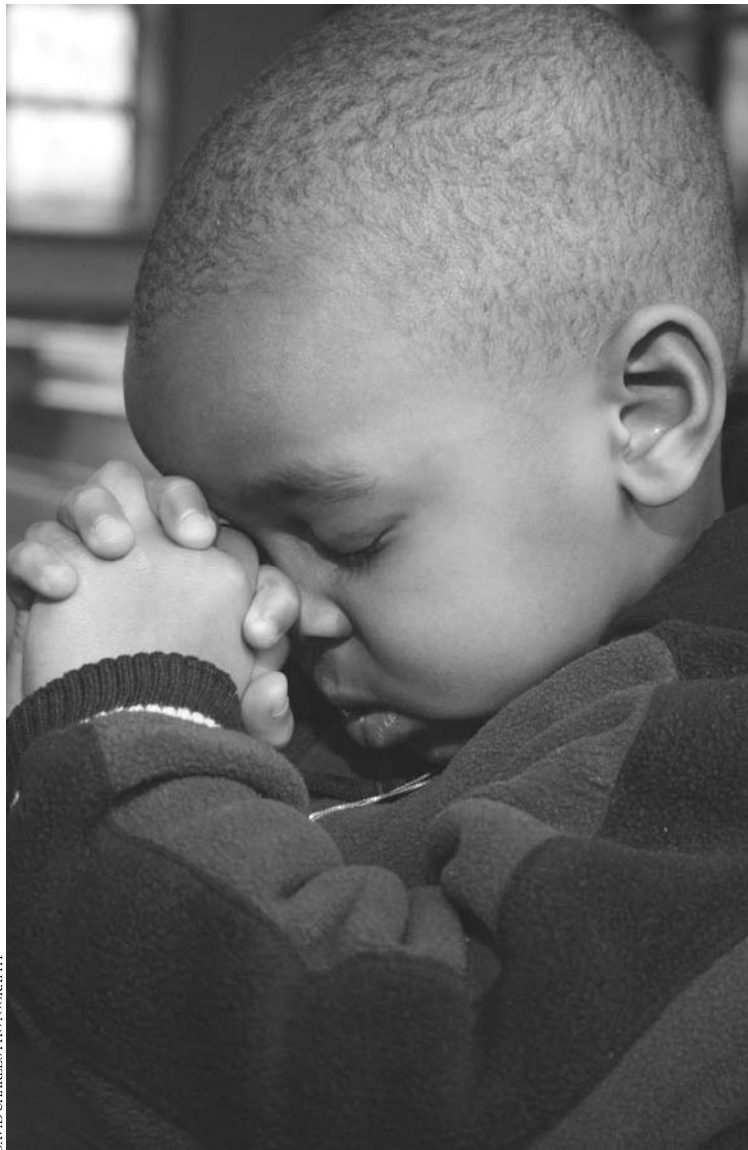
graces) which God gives to the believer, to those at the beginning of conversion, or to those who do not have access to the sacraments or have never heard the Gospel yet strive to live uprightly according to the light of their conscience.

Actual grace is a supernatural intervention of God given to help the Christian in a particular circumstance or at a certain point in his vocation. For example, one might receive a special grace to start an orphanage or to help deal with the death of a loved one or a painful situation. Also, the gifts or charisms

of the Spirit are actual graces because they are given to build up the Church and, like all actual graces, are further divine aids that help sanctify the members of the Church.

The point is not so much the terminology of grace (although this is helpful) but the reality behind these terms which is a real sharing in and communion with God in the Trinity. He is always the initiator in our relationship and so his gift of grace comes first. The human response to God's invitation of grace is free, and yet, even in it, grace has already been given to help prepare for and elicit this response from the human heart.

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