

Grace Convention

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- What is Grace? - Grace and our salvation
- Means of Grace
- The Work of Grace
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Brainstorming

Resources

Books & Articles

- The Spiritual Means - HHPS III

[The Spiritual Means - HH Pope Shenouda III.pdf](#)

- Salvation in the Orthodox Concept - HHPS III

[Salvation in the Orthodox Concept by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.pdf](#)

- The Divine Grace - Fr Tadros Y Malaty

[Divine Grace.pdf](#)

- Struggle and Grace Lesson outline

[4-32 - Struggle & Grace.pdf](#)

- Pre-servants lecture (Grace)

<https://www.suscopts.org/messages/lectures/soterlecture4.pdf>

- Pre-servants lecture (Works)

<https://www.suscopts.org/messages/lectures/soterlecture11.pdf>

Sermons

Pricing and Budget

Retreat Center Price List

- Rooms
 - Riverside-\$65 (some 2 beds some (K Bed + sofa)
 - Pool side- \$60 (some 2 beds some (K Bed + sofa)
 - Parking side- \$55(K Bed
 - Meals prices per person are as follows:
 - Breakfast\$10.00
 - Lunch -\$11.00
 - Dinner-\$13.00
 - Coffee and tea \$2 per day per person
 - Meeting room
 - Each section - \$100 Per Day
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Sessions

Sessions:

- +Grace and works (Dogma)
- +Means of grace and how to benefit from them (Church)
- +Visitations of grace and our response (spiritual)
- +Things that prevent God's grace from us (social / practical)
- +Biblical / Saints and God's grace with them (Bible/saints) - could be split if needed

What is Grace? - Grace and our salvation

Introduction:

- The word "Grace" is very important word in our lives as Christians
- "Grace" generally refers to a free gift or courteous goodwill
- The word "Grace" comes from being "graced" with something, or something being bestowed on you or given to you
 - i.e. The teacher graced me by allowing me to re-take my exam
- In Christianity, "Grace" refers to a free divine gift or divine contribution (The divine role in the life of man)
- "Grace" simply means a divine help that is sent to us
- "Grace" is a free gift we received from God, It is like a magnetic field that surrounds us
- Any gifts or talents we have are considered "grace" that we received from God
 - "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them:* " Romans 12:6
- Everything we do in our lives and even our salvation is connected with God's grace.

Examples of "graces" in our life:

- The first grace we received is the grace of "being" ... existence
- Another grace is being created in the image and likeness of God
- Having a family is a grace from God
- The food on table and the drink in our cup are considered from God's grace
- Therefore whenever something good happens in our lives we say by "God's grace"
 - I arrived from my travel
 - I passed the exam
 - I was sick and now I am healed
- Even in our greetings we say "peace and grace"
- We are surrounded by God's grace every second of our lives
- We live in the *covenant of grace*

Grace and our Salvation

- In the beginning
 - When God created Adam and Eve, He surrounded them by His grace.
 - Describe their initial state, being like children
 - God's grace covered them
 - As a result of Adam's sin, Adam and Eve lost God's grace, hence they felt naked

- Describe their state after the sin being exposed to corruption and sin
- This state continued throughout the Old Testament
- People longed and desired for God's grace and they could not find it
 - The righteous people wanted to live righteously and overcome sin but they were not capable of doing so without God's grace
- Then the Lord gave the law through Moses
- The Law did not help but on the contrary showed that the individuals are even more transgressors "sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful" Romans 7:13
- Even though the law was good, it revealed how sinful man is.
- Therefore, people needed divine intervention - righteousness became impossible to achieve without an aid
- In the New Testament
 - Now comes the new testament - St John in his gospel says "For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."
 - The beginning of the grace of the new testament is the incarnation
 - Because we needed a divine intervention - the Lord was incarnate
 - Following the incarnation, the whole economy of salvation is a grace from our Lord Jesus, His Crucifixion, His Resurrections, His Ascension, blessing and renewing our nature
 - Righteousness is now attainable - However, not by ourselves but with God's grace
 - We live in the *covenant of grace*

How are we saved? (Grace and works)

- The points under this title can be found in these two articles:
 - <https://www.suscopts.org/messages/lectures/soterlecture4.pdf>
 - <https://www.suscopts.org/messages/lectures/soterlecture11.pdf>
- Some people thought that God did everything for us to be saved so we do not need to work
- Some people thought that man can attain righteousness without depending on God in anything (Pelagianism)
- In Orthodoxy, salvation is a collaboration between God and man. God gives grace and man responds to this grace and does good works
- St Augustine said **"God created us without us: but He did not will to save us without us"**

Biblical examples:

- The War with Amalek
- The Miracle of Feeding the Multitudes

Means of Grace

Previously we established:

- Lecture 1
 - Grace is a free gift from God
 - Any blessing in our lives is considered a grace from God
 - God created man and surrounded him by His grace
 - Man lost that grace as a result of sin and corruption
 - Man became incapable of attaining righteousness on his own
 - The law could not help man attain righteousness
 - Man needed divine intervention to be able to attain righteousness
 - God graced man with the economy of salvation (Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, etc.)
 - In order to attain salvation, we must have faith (God's grace) and works
 - Man cannot attain salvation without the work of God's grace
- Lecture 2
 - Visitations of Grace:
 - Who gets visited by God's grace?
 - When do we get visited by God's grace?
 - Reasons for visitations of grace:
 - What should be our response towards visitations of grace?
 - What prevents God's grace from us? (Resisting God's grace)
 - How to benefit from the visitations of grace?
 - Growing in the grace

Introduction

- Now that we learned how wonderful God's grace is and how we should respond to it
- Where and how can we acquire God's grace?
- This is what is called *means of grace*

Means of grace

- Faith
 - In God's love
 - In God's economy of salvation
 - In the effectiveness of the sacraments
 - In the power of the spiritual means
- Church Sacraments
 - They are the means by which the believers receive God's grace
- Spiritual means

- Means to strengthen my spiritual life, tune my ears to listen to God's voice and aid me in my spiritual struggle

Where do we receive grace?

- We receive grace on a personal level and on a church level
- On a Church level:
 - "The Love of God the Father, and the grace of His only begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and the gift and communions of the Holy Spirit be with you all"
 - Everything that happens in the Church (storage of grace) is a source of grace in our life
 - The church has the authority to dispense to us God's grace to the whole world
 - That is why the fathers said there is no salvation outside of the church
- On a personal level:
 - God gives according to the needs of each one
 - "My grace is sufficient to you"
- I didn't do anything to deserve any of these graces but my role is to use them and to bring fruit
- Both levels require:
 - Faith in God's grace and unlimited love
 - Prayer
 - Humility

Church sacraments

- For every sacrament in the Church there is a visible sign and a hidden grace
- Discuss the hidden grace of each sacrament
- The grace of each sacrament takes us to the following sacrament
 - In baptism, our sins are washed away (including the Original Sin). The grace of baptism takes us to the grace of Myron where we receive the grace of the Holy Spirit and we are confirmed as children of God, etc.
- Each person's response to the sacrament is different

Spiritual means

- The points under this title can be found in this link: [The Spiritual Means](#)

The Work of Grace

Previously we established:

- Grace is a free gift from God
- Any blessing in our lives is considered a grace from God
- God created man and surrounded him by His grace
- Man lost that grace as a result of sin and corruption
- Man became incapable of attaining righteousness on his own
- The law could not help man attain righteousness
- Man needed divine intervention to be able to attain righteousness
- God graced man with the economy of salvation (Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, etc.)
- In order to attain salvation, we must have faith (God's grace) and works
- Man cannot attain salvation without the work of God's grace

What is the Work of Grace?

Introduction:

- Grace is a divine gift, given freely to us in various ways, and at various times
- Grace is sent to those who are weak to strengthens them, and those who are strong to increase their strength
- In spiritual life, God's grace plays a big role
 - God's grace leads to repentance
 - Give examples; after St Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, "Now when they heard *this*, they were cut to the heart" Acts 2:37
 - God's grace stops us from falling in sin
 - Give examples
 - God's grace encourages us to attain virtues
 - Give examples
 - Grace is a way of God reaching out to us to help us

Visitations of Grace:

- At certain times in our lives, God visits us by His grace
- Sometimes we find ourselves moved towards doing what is good - especially in the spiritual field
- This is the work of God's grace
- The fathers refer to that as a "visitation of grace"
 - We are "visited" by God's grace which encourages us to do good at the moment
 - Examples
- The icon of "Christ knocking on the door" describes the visitation of grace

- The fathers tell us that the visitations of grace come at the right time - in the right circumstances

When do get visited by God's grace?

- We could be "visited" by God's grace at any time
- It usually can be felt in the heart
- It could be:
 - In the middle of the liturgy
 - In the middle of my personal prayer
 - In the middle of sin (i.e. God's calling of Saul while he's going to Damascus)
 - It could be through an event in your life
 - Through a vision or a dream
 - Through a message from your spiritual father
 - In the midst of hardships or trials
- Let us look at the life of St Anthony as an example:
- We know at least 3 occasions where he was visited by God's grace and it was life changing for him
 - At his father's death - He realized that life on earth is temporary and less valuable than eternal life
 - Listening to the Gospel at church - He decided to leave everything and head to the desert
 - When the lady rebuked him by the river - He decided to go far into the desert to live in solitude
- The same grace who made St Anthony a great saint is inside of me so what is the difference?

Who gets visited by God's grace?

- God visits everyone with His grace
 - Some are more sensitive to it God's grace than others
 - Some are more tuned to listen to God's voice than other
 - Jonah - (Was a visitation of grace to the Ninevites - He also was a visitation of grace to the mariners in the ship - In the process, the Lord visited Jonah himself)
 - The calling of Matthew
 - The visit to Zacchaeus
 - St Mary of Egypt - while in the midst of her sin
 - St Moses the strong - while searching for the true God

Reasons for visitations of grace:

- To wake us up from laziness
- Leads us to repent
- Ignites and strengthens our spiritual life
- Corrects the course of our lives sometimes

- Reminds us with the consequences of a wrong do it to stop us
- Call us to service
- To aid us to carry on with our the service
- Even with saints, to reach higher levels of sainthood
- Gives us a blessing

What should be our response towards visitations of grace?

- It is important to note that God's grace works in us to produce good works but it does NOT force us to do good works (Grace and Free will)
 - Grace is an internal movement towards what is good and Godly, but it does not force or pushes you to do anything, the decision has to come from you
- We are in need of God's grace to be able to do anything good. The Lord Jesus said "**without Me you can do nothing.**" John 15:5
- God's grace works with us all the time. However, the question is do we work with it or not?
- It depends on my response towards God's grace
- Let's take the Right and the Left hand thieves as an example:
 - Both were criminals
 - Both were rightly punished
 - Both saw the Lord in front of them (visited by Him)
 - However only one responded to that visitation and gained eternal life
- Sometimes may respond well to God's grace and some may resist it

What prevents God's grace from us? (Resisting God's grace)

- Free will dictates that we are free to respond to the God's grace or not
- There are many things that prevents God's grace from me:
 - Being careless with the word of God (Not listening carefully to sermons, SS lessons, Bible study, etc.)
 - Focusing on the speaker instead of listening -(i.e. this abouna is too strict, that abouna is too spiritual for me, etc.)
 - Lack of circumspection when it comes to my spiritual canon (i.e. not listening to the advise of my spiritual father)
 - Not living a true life of Obedience (i.e. I listen to my parents, servants, or abouna with no intention of obeying them)
 - Resisting spiritual messages and warnings
 - Not learning from previous mistakes (repeated confessions)
 - Not participating in spiritual days or conventions (i.e. friends are not going)
 - Giving into strange ideology (i.e. the Church is living the stone age) "Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy." Jonah 2:8
 - Lack of thanksgiving (i.e. Not considering the multitude of blessings in one's life)
 - Lack of faith - (i.e. doubting the presence of God's grace) "But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*" Hebrews 11:6
 - Negativity - (i.e. God doesn't love me)
 - Responding to the grace but not following through - (i.e. like Pharaoh in letting the people go)

- Satan opposes God's grace - (i.e. You hear God's voice saying go reconcile with your friend, then you hear another voice saying "how about my dignity?")
- **"Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts" Hebrews 3:15**
 - "Hear His voice" is the work of grace, "harden your hearts" is our response towards it

Can God's grace abandon us?

- Sometimes, out of God's love, He allows His grace to abandon us
 - To send us a message to learn from
 - As a warning in order to straighten our ways
 - As a result of continuous resistance to the visitation of grace
 - King Saul
 - "Do not quench the Spirit." 1 Thessalonians 5:19

How to benefit from the visitations of grace?

- Respond to the visitation of grace promptly
 - Do not say my will is weak
 - God's grace can strengthen your will - but you should respond to it
 - Do not say my sin is too big
 - "where sin abounded, grace abounded much more" Romans 5:20
 - Do not say I cannot do it
 - "My Grace is sufficient to you"
- We need to work with God's grace
 - Grace and works
 - God's grace will plant a seed, you need to water and care for the seed to grow
 - God's grace will save you from falling into sin, you do not return to that sin again
- Pray for God's grace and to grow in God's grace
- Humble yourself
 - "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." James 4:6
 - St Mary - Full of grace
- Prayer to receive grace from God
 - Intercession of the saints
 - Work of the church with you
- Be ready in your heart
 - " But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God" John 1:12
- Strive to be worthy of that grace
 - "to the praise of the glory of His grace" Eph 1:6
- Give thanks
 - Consider that everything good in your life is a result of God's grace with you
- Hold fast to every opportunity
 - Spend more time in prayers
 - Go into a new depth in the liturgy
 - Read more chapters in the Bible

- "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. " 2 Timothy 2:1

Growing in the grace "grow in the grace" 2 Peter 3:18

- Growing in the grace is a commandment that we are asked to obey
- Not only to use the grace given to me but to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord
- So how can we enjoy and grow in God's grace?
- Any growth can be measured - the measure of growing in grace is fruits
 - Fruit of repentance
 - Real change "Therefore bear **fruits worthy of repentance**" **Matthew 3:8**
 - Fruit of the Spirit
 - Galatians 5:22-23
 - But **the fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such **there** is no law.
 - Fruit in the service

Workshops

Examples:

- Prodigal son
- St Augustine
- St Moses the strong
- St Mary of Egypt
- St Anthony
- Jonah