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 uncapable 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 **fruit**s **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 **the**re is no law.
  - Fruit in the service

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