

Conference of National Spiritual Assistants

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Monthly Spiritual Message October 2018

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS THE RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER (Part 8)

To be in a State of Grace

St Francis' Letter to the Faithful, added to the Rule of the Secular Franciscans by Saint Pope Paul VI¹ touches on two points: the life of a person who does "penance" (i.e., a person turned towards God), and the life of a person who refuses grace.²

It is now considered a somewhat old-fashioned, black and white terminology to speak about being in a **State of Grace**. However, it does clarify precisely the good, the bad and the ugly. To be in a state of grace, you must be free from mortal sin (ugly) and if possible, free from venial sin (bad) and be a really good person (good).

Being in a state of grace, however, is only the beginning of a sincere Christian life which should also be active in charitable works. So don't pat yourself on the back for simply being in a state of grace. Don't suggest that everyone else is going to hell, because that would be downright uncharitable and would probably knock you out of a state of grace - instantly, because of your arrogance.³

The definition of holiness is the perfection of charity. It means that a person is living or has lived a life of selfless service by caring for others. Only those who show heroic self-sacrifice and a clear understanding of what St Francis calls "perfect joy" and compassion are canonized.

To be in a State of Grace and do nothing for others at all, puts us in jeopardy of being judgemental of others and becoming sanctimonious⁴ and self-righteous.⁵ Our Lord gave us a criteria for discerning this attitude, "*by their fruits, you will know them.*"⁶

The term 'State of Grace' was meant to clarify for us the beautiful relationship we have with God when we are free from mortal sin. When, by sanctifying grace, there is an indwelling of the Holy Trinity within us. In his letter to the bishop in support of St Theresa of Avila being allowed to build her convent in Avila, St Peter of Alcantara OFM writes, "*Please grant the wish of this lady because I tell you the Holy Spirit resides within her.*"⁷

¹ Canonized by Pope Francis on October 14, 2018. Pope Francis said of him, "Today he still urges us, to live our common vocation: the universal call to holiness."

² Fr Benet A. Fonck O.F.M. Commentary on the Rule. "Trilogy" p.2

³ **Arrogance:** haughtiness, conceit, self-importance, egotism, sense of superiority.

⁴ **Sanctimonious:** making a show of being morally superior to other people. **Synonyms:** self-righteous, holier-than thou, churchy, pious, pietistic, moralizing, smug, superior, hypocritical, insincere, for form's sake, to keep up appearances.

⁵ **Self-righteous:** having or characterized by a certainty, especially an unfounded one, that one is totally correct or morally superior. **Synonyms:** sanctimonious, holier-than-thou, self-satisfied, smug, priggish, complacent, too good to be true, pious, pietistic, moralizing, superior, hypocritical correct or morally superior, "self-righteous indignation and complacency"

⁶ Matthew: 7:16

⁷ The original of this letter is kept in the convent at Avila, in Spain where it is on display for all to see.

However, we must always remember that all grace is a free gift of God, it is not automatically given or something we can earn. For instance, we must pray to God for the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity. This terminology, **State of Grace**, in the Catechism of the Church, is now carefully worded to include the responsibility of Christians to be of service to the Church and the community and to live out their mission in the world. “The Church does not call us half measures, but to holiness!”⁸

This calling to live the Gospel way of life is very clearly expressed also in the Secular Franciscan Rule. Christian life is not simply living in a state of grace. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not given for the glorification of the individual person, or for a life of devotion, but for a very active service to the Church and as a leaven in the midst of secular society. This is clearly set out in THE CATECHISM OF THE CHURCH:

2003 Grace is first and foremost the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us. But grace also includes the gifts that the Spirit grants us to associate us with his work, to enable us to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth of the Body of Christ, the Church.

2004 Among the special graces ought to be mentioned the graces of state that accompany the exercise of the responsibilities of the Christian life and of the ministries within the Church.

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

2005 Since it belongs to the supernatural order, grace escapes our experience and cannot be known except by faith. We cannot therefore rely on our feelings or our works to conclude that we are justified and saved.

However, according to the Lord's words “Thus you will know them by their fruits” - reflection on God's blessings in our lives and in the lives of the saints offers us a guarantee that grace is at work in us and spurs us on to an ever-greater faith and an attitude of trustful poverty.⁹

A pleasing illustration of this attitude is found in the reply of St. Joan of Arc to a question posed as a trap by her ecclesiastical judges. Asked if she knew that she was in God's grace, she replied: “If I am not, may it please God to put me in it; if I am, may it please God to keep me there.”

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PLEASE distribute this Monthly Spiritual Message to all MEMBERS of your FRATERNITY.
(This includes Spiritual Assistants and isolated members)

⁸ Pope Francis: Canonization of St Pope Paul VI.

⁹ Poverty in this sense is to recognise when it comes to grace we all need to be humble, honest beggars like St Francis who considered himself the greatest of sinner because as he said, “If Christ had pursued so great a criminal with such mercy, I surely think he would be much more grateful to God than I.” See: Bonaventure, Major Legend. Ch. 6:6.