



Ask, Father James:

“Amazing Grace!” Why do we call grace “amazing”?

One of the cornerstones of our Christian belief is the doctrine of grace; the love and mercy granted us by God out of love and mercy, not necessarily because we did anything to earn it. It is God's life in us. The doctrine of grace is the belief in God's favour towards all humans. That God grants us salvation through the sacrifice of his son Jesus Christ who died in atonement for the sins of all humankind. The most central Gospel passage on which this doctrine is based is; “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Grace is the unearned mercy or undeserved mercy of God which forgives all sins. God's grace raises the human above mortal limitations and inspires the individual to do God's work. Grace forgives the human, then makes him a better person. Isn't this amazing?

Every Mass begins with this amazing grace truth: “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ...and the love of God....” (such as in Romans 16:20, II Corinthians 13:14, and Galatians 6:18). This opening introduction of the Mass means; the merciful attitude of Christ towards us sinful humans through Christ sacrificing himself is the sacrificial expression of grace and that is why we sign ourselves with the sign of His Cross at the beginning of the Mass. Through God's grace that came to us through God's son, humans were offered undeserved favour. What did humankind do to deserve such a grace? God's motive for this unearned grace and undeserved mercy is God's love for humans.

Every human person is invited to participate in grace – the life of God in humanity through the Trinity; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When we get baptized, we are incorporated into His Grace and this makes us pleasing in the eyes of God. Martin Luther was so taken by grace that he concluded that we are saved by “grace and only Grace” (*sola gratia*) and Catholics tradition reply that grace is more than an abstract word; grace is God giving Godself; that in grace God is given, and as such, grace brings along a transformative experience and reality change and that if the gospel message of grace is based on Christ, then it also organically includes Mary his mother, because following the God's promise of Genesis 3:15, it was God who wove Mary into the story of incarnate grace.

Throughout Christian history, Christians have through the instrumentality of the arts and songs praised God for this Grace that offered hope to humans in troubled times. One such song is the hymn, “Amazing Grace.” This hymn was composed by a former English slave ship Captain, John Newton. John Newton wrote the hymn Amazing Grace after finding God, over 200 years ago (1779). He wrote the hymn from personal experience. In the rough-and-tumble of the sea storm, this British sailor John Newton, who, caught in a terrible storm and fearing for his life, recalls the events that brought him to this harrowing moment. Upon safely reaching land, Newton devotes himself to God and turns his life around. Later in life, Newton becomes a minister, speaks out against slavery, and pens the now-famous lyrics to “Amazing Grace” and recalling “how sweet that sound...” that turned his life around.

The song, “Amazing Grace” is now one of the most popular Christian hymns. The Late Aretha Franklin's rendition of ‘Amazing Grace’ will give one chills and every time this hymn is rendered in any church service we are invited to meditate on how God's grace has saved us even though we didn't deserve it. The hymn reassures that: What is given by God no human being can take. Amazing grace is God's gift to us! Unmerited Grace of God. Its main message is that forgiveness and redemption are possible regardless of sins committed and that the soul can be delivered from despair through the mercy of God.

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