

Beyond Our Strength

Saved by Grace Alone

What do Catholics believe about salvation?

Along with most of our fellow Christians, Catholics believe that humanity has been separated from God by sin. In our own way, each of us has chosen to turn away from God through selfishness and pride. Spiritually, it is as if we are standing on one side of the Grand Canyon and God is on the other. It is beyond our power to take a shovel and fill in the Grand Canyon; repairing the spiritual damage separating us from God is equally beyond our strength.

How does separation from God affect us?

God loves us and created us to be in union with him. Whether or not we recognize it, our hearts yearn for God. Separated from him by our sins, we do not experience the fullness of life that he intended for us. Sin hurts and enslaves us, as one can see in cases of addiction. We are like the people of Israel during their time in Egypt, enslaved and suffering cruelly, unable to free ourselves. This is why we needed Jesus to come into the world as our Savior.

How is Jesus our Savior?

To save the human race from our spiritual brokenness, God chose to enter the world himself. He became man as Jesus of Nazareth. Because Jesus is fully God and fully man, he is able to heal the division between God and humanity. In the time of the Exodus, God sent Moses to free the Israelites and bring them to a Promised Land. When Jesus gave his life for us on the cross, he was a "new Moses," breaking the bonds of sin and offering us freedom and new life.

What if Jesus had not come into the world?

Without Jesus, we would have no hope of being healed from sin. Our separation from God would continue after death, for God cannot force us to love him. This state of separation is called hell. When we say that Jesus is our Savior, we mean that he forgives our sin and offers us the gift of eternal union with him one day in heaven. But as wonderful as this is, there is even more to salvation than this!

What more does Jesus desire for us?

As Jesus said in the Gospels, "I have come that they may have life, and may have it abundantly." (John 10:10) In other words, he does not just want to save us from hell; he wants us to experience a fullness of life right now. He wants to transform us into adopted sons and daughters of God the Father, with hearts that gradually become more like his heart. We can have freedom from our old sins and evil habits, and have a new life. Like Paul, we can rejoice, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." (Gal 2:20)

Do I have to earn this gift of salvation and new life?

Imagine parents looking at their newborn child: they love their child, even though there is absolutely nothing that the child has done to earn their love or the gift of life. The same applies to our relationship with God. He loves you more than the best parents ever loved their children, without any conditions, no matter what you have done in the past. You do not have to earn his love or his gift of new life: he offers it to you freely! We are saved by grace alone. (Eph 2:8-9)