



What is Salvation? How do I get to Heaven?

Some believe God is the divine Santa Clause, making His list and checking it twice to see who is naughty and who is nice. Some believe salvation is “*by faith alone*”. Some believe all good people go to Heaven. What does the Church teach?

God calls all to be saved. “*He wishes to give eternal life to all those who seek salvation*” (Catechism, 55). There is no sin bigger than God and no sinner God cannot forgive. “*There is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer*” (Catechism, 605). Though God may seem far away and our sins too great, “*everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*” (Romans 10:13). The Church teaches there is no way to know if a person’s soul is in eternal fire. Even Judas, who betrayed Jesus and committed suicide, may have repented before he died.

Salvation is only by God’s grace through Jesus Christ. “*The initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, no one can merit the initial grace of forgiveness and justification*” (Catechism, 2010). We cannot guarantee any good soul is in Heaven, unless they have also accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior. For we are “*justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus*” (Catechism, 1992). Salvation is not earned by faith or by works.

Faith is our response to God’s grace. *Faith is assurance of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen*” (Hebrews 11:1). A mother calls to her family, “Dinner is ready!”. The family responds in faith by gathering at the table. They do not see the food, but come to the table with conviction food will be there. “Faith alone” brings the family to the table, and their faith is rewarded when the food is served. But the mother, not faith, provides the food. “*God in the beginning created human beings and made them subject to their own free choice*” (Sirach 15:14). God’s grace calls everyone to the table of salvation. Each person, by their free will, can say “Yes!” and come to the table or “No” and reject God’s call.

Works confirm our profession of faith. “*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?*” (James 2:14). A home owner hires a person who professes to be a plumber. A week later, all the pipes are leaking. The plumber’s works did not confirm their profession of being a plumber. So, the home owner rejects that person as a plumber and never hires them again. By works, Christians confirm to the Father and to the world their profession of faith. Good works do not make a person Christian. But we know a Christian by their works, just as we know a plumber by their work. Without works, a profession is only words.

Salvation is the beginning and not the end. “*For the grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires*” (Titus 2: 11-12). The goal a Christian should not be just to get to Heaven. Salvation is more than Heaven. Grace continues to work in us after we accept the Lord’s salvation. Every day, Christians must continue to say “Yes!” to the grace which turns them away from sin and transforms them into the image of Christ. “*Moved by grace, man turns toward God and away from sin*” (Catechism, 1989). The Christian must live the Beatitudes every day. Otherwise, where is their faith?

In summary...Grace calls, faith responds, grace saves and works confirm. From the moment we accept God’s salvation, until the moment of death, “*we are being transformed into His image*” (2 Corinthians 3:18). “*For God is the one who, for his good purpose, works in you*” (Philippians 2:13). Those who claim to follow Christ but are not being transformed into His image are not completely in Christ. The souls who sincerely profess Christ but are not fully in Christ at the end of this lifetime will be purified in Purgatory before entering into Heaven.

Meditation:

- Does my attitude towards Christ, salvation and Heaven need to change? How?
- Where in my life is God’s grace working, trying to get me to change? How can I respond in faith?
- What works in my life this past week might make somebody believe my profession of faith is not real?
- In what ways might an examination of conscience every night help me transform into the image of Christ?