

How do we get God's grace?

Well let's start by distinguishing between the two kinds of graces: actual grace and sanctifying, or habitual, grace. Actual grace is external from us; it refers to the nudges that we receive from God to respond to his call. God may give us a special call to conversion or to a vocation, for example, and then it is up to us to respond. Sanctifying grace, on the other hand resides within us and lives in our soul. It is a free gift, a *favor*, from God that allows us to become adopted sons and daughters of God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way: "*Sanctifying grace is an habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love. Habitual grace, the permanent disposition to live and act in keeping with God's call, is distinguished from actual graces which refer to God's interventions, whether at the beginning of conversion or in the course of the work of sanctification.*" (CCC #2000)

To sanctify means to make holy, and we need to be holy to enter the Kingdom of Heaven; we need to have sanctifying grace within us. Because of original sin, we are not born with sanctifying grace; we receive it for the first time in the Sacrament of Baptism. (Mary was conceived without original sin and was thus born with sanctifying grace, and that is why at the Annunciation the angel could say: "*Hail Mary, full of grace.*") We receive additional graces through the other sacraments, especially through frequent reception of the Eucharist and Reconciliation, that help us to grow in holiness. The Catechism states: "*The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us.*" (CCC #1131) When we commit a mortal sin we lose our sanctifying grace; we no longer have divine life within us. It can only be regained by going to Confession.

We can also merit graces through our prayer and charitable actions[; two key practices in this Lenten season]. The Catechism states: "*Moved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, we can then merit for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life. ... These graces and goods are the object of Christian prayer. Prayer attends to the grace we need for meritorious actions.*" (CCC #2010)

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