
Pope at audience: “We have all been justified, but God calls us to cooperate”

“We, who were sinners, have become just”: the doctrine of justification is thus enshrined in these words spoken by Pope Francis in Wednesday’s general audience in Paul VI Hall, enhanced with unscripted remarks. Taking Saint Paul’s teaching as a whole, justification is the consequence of “God’s merciful initiative of offering forgiveness”, Francis explained: “this is our God, so very good, merciful, patient, full of mercy, who continually grants pardon. Justification is God who forgives everyone first in Christ: this is justification. In fact, God, through Jesus’ death, destroyed sin and definitively granted us his pardon and salvation. Thus justified, sinners are welcomed by God and reconciled with Him. It is as though the original relationship between the Creator and the creature before the disobedience of sin intervened has been restored.”

“Justification comes through grace. Only through grace”,

the Pope underlined: “We have been justified, we have been saved, through pure grace, not because of our own merits.” “We are sinners, yes, we are; but we live our lives with this grace of God that justifies us each time that we ask forgiveness”, Francis remarked. *“We do not become just through our own effort, no, it is not us, but it is Christ, with his grace, who makes us just.”* The example given is that of Paul’s conversion, “willing to renounce everything that before had made him rich, because he had discovered that only God’s grace had saved him.”

“Justification, if it does not bear fruit with our works, is only that, buried, dead. It is there, but we must activate it with our works”,

is Francis’ guidance, incorporating the teachings of St Paul and St James. For both, “the response of faith demands that we be active in our love for God and in our love of neighbour. That love saved all of us, it freely justified us.” “Justification through faith underlines the priority of the grace that God offers without distinction to those who believe in his Son”, the Pope observes: “We must not, however, conclude that the Mosaic Law, for Paul, had lost its value; rather, it remains an irrevocable gift from God, It is, the Apostle writes, ‘holy’”. *“Even for our spiritual life, observing the commandments is essential . But even here, we cannot count on our efforts”*, is the emphasis of the Pontiff, since “the grace of God that we receive in Christ is fundamental, That grace that comes from being the justification given us by Christ who already paid for us. From Him, we receive that gratuitous love that allows us, in our turn, to love in concrete ways.” Hence the topical relevance of Saint James’ teachings, who wrote: “Man is justified by works and not by faith alone”. “It seems to be the contrary, but it is not the contrary” - Francis said - “for as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.”

“What is God’s style? God’s style is nearness, compassion and tenderness”,

the Pope reiterated in concluding the audience: “He always draws near to us, is compassionate and tender. And justification is precisely the God’s greatest nearness with us, men and women, God’s greatest compassion for us men and women, the greatest tenderness of the Father.” “Justification is this gift of. Christ, of the death and resurrection of Christ that makes us free”, the Pope remarked: “Fundamentally you are just. Fundamentally, we are saints. Thus, the light of faith allows us to recognize how infinite God’s mercy is, his grace that works for our good. But that same light also makes us see the responsibility that has been entrusted to us to collaborate with God in his work of salvation.” “The power of grace needs to be coupled with our works of mercy which we are called to

live to bear witness to how tremendous is God's love." "Let us move ahead with this trust – Francis concluded - : we have all been justified, we are just in Christ. We must effect that justice with our works."

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