

FAITH
&
JUSTIFICATION

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We believe in the Holy Spirit; He is the essential Power of the Father and the Son (Gen. 1:2). He dwells in Them and is co-eternal and consubstantial with Them; He proceeds from Them (John 14:16, 26; 16:7-15). He is one God with Them (Rom. 8:9-11; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:4-8; 3:16) and is always a Person distinct from the One and the Other (Matt. 28:19).

This is what the Church has well settled, by the Word of God, against Macedonius^[1] and other similar heretics. His infinite might and power are demonstrated in the creation and preservation of all creatures, since the beginning of the world (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:29, 30).

But, in this treatise, we shall especially consider the effects which He produces in the children of God; how, along with faith, He brings to them the graces of God to make them sensible of the efficacy and power of them (Rom. 8:12-17; 1 Cor. 2:11, 12; 1 John 4:13); in brief, how He brings them more and more to the end and goal to which they have been predestinated before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-4).

The Holy Spirit makes us partakers of Jesus Christ by Faith Alone

The Holy Spirit is therefore the One through whom the Father places and maintains His elect in possession of Jesus Christ, His Son; and, consequently, of all the graces which are necessary to their salvation.

But it is necessary, in the first place, that the Holy Spirit makes us suitable and ready to receive Jesus Christ. This is what He does in creating in us, by His pure goodness and Divine mercy, that which we call 'faith' (Eph. 1: 17; Phil. 1: 29; 2 Thess. 3:2), the sole instrument by which we take hold of Jesus Christ when He is offered to us, the sole vessel to receive Him (John 3:1-13, 33-36).

The means which the Holy Spirit uses to create and preserve faith in us

In order to create in us this instrument of faith, and also to feed and strengthen it more and more, the Holy Spirit uses two ordinary means (without however communicating to them His power, but working by them): the preaching of the Word of God, and His Sacraments (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts

6:4; Rom. 10:17; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23-25).

Further on, we will return to this; in the first place we shall define what this so precious faith is, and what are its effects and powers.

How faith is necessary, and what faith is

We are at this point such enemies of our own salvation, because of our natural corruption (Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14), that if God had merely contented Himself to tell us that we shall find our salvation in Jesus Christ, we would only mock it; thus has the world always done and will do until the end (1 Cor. 1:23-25; John 10:20; Acts 2:13; Luke 23:35). Even more, if He added nothing more than to tell us also that the means whereby we experience the efficacy of this remedy against eternal death is to believe in Jesus Christ, that would profit us nothing (John 3:5-6). For, in all this, we are more than dumb (Ps. 51:15; Is. 6:5; Jer. 1:6), deaf (Ps. 40:6; John 8:47; Matt. 13:13), and blind through the corruption of our nature (John 1:5; 3:3; 9:41). It would be no more possible for us even to wish to believe than it would be for a dead man to fly (John 12:38, 39; 6:44).

It is necessary therefore that with all this, the good Father, who chose us for His glory, should come to multiply His mercy towards His enemies. In declaring to us that He has given His own only Son so that whosoever takes hold of Him by faith should not perish (John 3:16), He creates also in us this instrument of faith which He requires from us.

Now, the faith of which we speak does not consist only in believing that God is God, and that the contents of His Word are true: — for the devils indeed have this faith, and it only makes them tremble (James 2:19) — But we call 'faith' a certain knowledge which, by His grace and goodness alone, the Holy Spirit engraves more and more in the hearts of the elect of God (1 Cor. 2:6-8). By this knowledge, each of them, being assured in his heart of his election, appropriates to himself and applies to himself the promise of his salvation in Jesus Christ.

Faith, I say, does not only believe that Jesus Christ is dead and risen again for sinners, but it comes also to embrace Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:16,39; Heb. 10:22, 23; 1 John 4:13; 5:19, etc). Whosoever truly believes trusts in Him alone and is assured of his salvation to the point of no longer doubting it (Eph. 3:12). That is why St. Bernard said, conformably to the whole of Scripture, what

follows, "If you believe that your sins cannot be blotted out except by Him against whom alone you have sinned, you do well. But add yet one point: that you believe that your sins have been forgiven you by Him. This is the testimony that the Holy Spirit gives to our heart, saying, 'Your sins are forgiven you'."

The object and power of true faith

Since Jesus Christ is the object of faith, and indeed Jesus Christ as He is held forth to us in the Word of God, there follow two points which should be noted well.

On the one side, where there is no Word of God but only the word of man, whoever he be, there is no faith there, but only a dream or an opinion which cannot fail to deceive us (Rom. 10:2-4; Mark 16:15,16; Rom. 1:28; Gal. 1:8-9).

On the other side, faith embraces and appropriates Jesus Christ and all that is in Him, since He has been given to us on the condition of believing in Him (John 17:20, 21; Rom. 8:9). There follows one of two things: either all that is necessary for our salvation is not in Jesus Christ, or if all is indeed there, he who has Jesus Christ by faith has everything. Now, to say that all which is necessary for our salvation is not in Jesus Christ is a very horrible blasphemy, for this would only make Him a Saviour in part (Matt. 1:21). There remains therefore the other part: in having Jesus Christ, by faith, we have in Him all that is required for our salvation (Rom. 5:1).

This is what the Apostle says, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ." (Rom. 8:1).

How must that word be understood which we say after St Paul, "We are justified by faith alone"

Here is the explanation of our justification by faith alone: faith is the instrument which receives Jesus Christ and, consequently, which receives His righteousness, that is to say, all perfection. When therefore, after St. Paul (Rom. 1: 17; 3:21-27; 4:3; 5:1; 9:30-33; 11:6; Gal 2:16-21; 3:9, 10, 18; Phil. 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5; Heb. 11:7) we say that we are justified by faith alone, or freely, or by faith without works (for all these ways of speaking give the same sense), we do not say that faith is a virtue which makes us righteous, in ourselves, before God. For this would be to put faith in the place

of Jesus Christ who is, alone, our perfect and entire righteousness.

But we speak thus with the Apostle, and we say that by faith alone we are justified, insomuch as it embraces Him who justifies us, Jesus Christ, to whom it unites and joins us. We are then made partakers of Him and of the benefits which He possesses. These, being imputed and gifted to us, are more than sufficient to make us acquitted and accounted righteous before God.

To be assured of one's salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is not at all arrogance or presumption

It is established that to be assured of one's salvation, through faith, is not only neither presumption nor arrogance, but, on the contrary, is the sole means of stripping oneself of all pride, to give all glory to God (Rom. 8:16, 38; Eph. 3:12; Heb. 10:22, 23; 1 John 4:13; 5:19; Rom. 3:27; 4:20; 1 Cor. 4:4; 9:26, 27). Because faith alone teaches us to go out of ourselves, and compels us, to earnestly acknowledge that in ourselves there is nothing but cause for complete damnation. Thus it sends us away to Jesus Christ, and it teaches us and assures us that we shall find salvation before God through His righteousness alone. Truly, all that is in Jesus Christ, that is to say, all the righteousness and perfection (in Him there was no sin and moreover He has fulfilled all the righteousness of the Law), is placed to our account and gifted to us as if it were our own, provided that we embrace Him by faith.

That is why St. Bernard said, "The testimony of our conscience is our glory: not the testimony which the deceived mind, deceiving its owner, gives from itself to the vain-glorious Pharisee (Luke 18:11, 12); this testimony is not true. But the testimony which the Holy Spirit gives to our spirit is true." Faith finds in Jesus Christ all that is necessary for salvation.

This requires to be expounded in detail, so that one may know if, through faith, we take hold of a remedy sufficient to assure us fully of life eternal; according to what is written, "The just shall live by faith". (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:16, 17; Gal. 3:11). We say therefore that everything which obstructs man from communion with God, who is perfectly righteous and good, lies in three points. But, in the face of each of them, we find the remedy, not in ourselves, but in Jesus Christ and all that He has, provided that we are united and joined to Him in communion of all benefits (John 17:9-11, 20-26).

That is why the Church, that is to say, the assembly of believers, is called the

Spouse of Jesus Christ, her Husband (Rom. 7:2-6; 8:35; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:31, 32); it is to more clearly show the greatness of the union and communion which exists between Jesus Christ and those who, through faith, have entrusted themselves to him. For, by virtue of this union and this spiritual marriage through faith, He takes all our miseries upon Himself, and we receive from Him all His treasures, by His pure goodness and mercy. This is what we are going to see.

**The remedy which faith finds in Jesus Christ alone
against the first assault of the first temptation:
"The multitude of our sins": The assurance which
we can have on this point regarding the saints or ourselves**

Therefore let us now see how, in Jesus Christ alone, we find sure remedies against all the temptations of Satan and all the troubles of our conscience.

In the first place, Satan and our conscience, to show that we are truly unworthy of being saved and very worthy of perishing, put in the forefront the nature of God, perfectly righteous, He who is the great Enemy and Avenger of all iniquity. Now, it is true, we are covered with infinite sins. It follows therefore that there is nothing more for us to do than to wait for the wages of sin, that is to say, eternal death (Rom. 6:23).

What shall men be able to plead against this conclusion of Satan and of their conscience? Certainly, nothing which would avail, unless it is what I say. For if they have recourse to the mercy of God, forgetting His righteousness, they are deceiving themselves. One thing is certain, the mercy of God is such that it is necessary, however, that His righteousness also be totally acknowledged: which we declared already.

If we desire then, in order to cover our sins, to plead the merits of the saints:

1. We do them a great wrong; for David himself writes, "Enter not into judgement with Thy servant." (Ps. 143:2), and, in another passage, he confesses that his works cannot ascend to God (Ps. 16:2). And what does St Paul say of Abraham, this holy person and father of believers? "If Abraham", he says, "were justified by his works, he has reason for self-glorying, but not before God. For, what says the Scripture? Abraham believed in God, and this was imputed to him for righteousness." (Rom. 4:2-3). And what says St. Paul regarding himself? "Certainly," he says, "I do not feel guilty, but I am not

thereby justified." (1 Cor. 4:4). How then can we plead the merits of the saints to satisfy for our sins, since they themselves have recourse only to the mercy of God alone, procured by Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:8)?

2. Moreover, if the saints themselves have merited paradise by their holy life (which cannot be, seeing that they themselves testify to the contrary), would they not have already received payment for their merits? With what claim, therefore, shall we plead them before God one more time?

3. Since, to say that they had so much merit that there remains some left over for us, is to give the lie to what they have left us in writing. Moreover, is it not as if we were saying that they have nothing to do with the death of Jesus Christ, seeing that they have in themselves more than enough to have need of Him?

4. And then, if they have excess merits, in what way would we know that they are ours? Is — it because we think it so, or because we have bought them? But St. Peter rebukes Simon the magician for this false and accursed trade: "May thy money perish with thee," he says, "for Thou hast thought to buy the gift of God with money". (Acts 8:20).

There is how, in believing that we honour the saints, we actually dishonour them as much as possible. Now, if the works of the saints have nothing to merit in this sphere, what shall we find in ourselves, or in any other living man, which is sufficient to fortify us against this assault of Satan? But, in order to cut short all these false imaginings, let us consider the following points.

Firstly, would we not think a man to be destitute of sense who persuades himself that he is free of a creditor under the pretext that he imagines he has paid, or that another has paid for him? This is how we always act towards God when we are not content with the sole satisfaction of Jesus Christ. For, what foundation have all the rest except the fantasy of men, as if God must find good all that seems good to us. But, on the contrary, let us hear what Jesus Christ says: "They honour me in vain, in teaching the commandments of men." (Matt 15:9). And, in another passage, "When you come to appear before me, who then demanded these things from you?" (Is. 1:12).

Secondly, In the second place, when we say that we rest on the sole mercy of God, but we imagine that we ourselves have paid for it, wholly or in part, is this not but to mock His mercy (Rom. 4:4)?

Thirdly, not to be content with the sole merit of Jesus Christ, but to wish to add others to it, is this not as if one were saying that Christ is not Jesus, that is to say, our Saviour, but only in part (Gal. 2:21,)?

Fourthly, is this not to strip God of His perfect righteousness (Rom. 3:26), and consequently of His Divinity (in the measure in which that is possible to us!) by daring to oppose to His wrath the works of men, against whom so much could be said, no matter how good they are (Luke 17:10)? David said, "Enter not into judgement with thy servant." (Ps. 143:2).

Let us therefore learn to reply in a different manner to the aforesaid argument of Satan. You say, Satan, that God is perfectly righteous and the Avenger of all iniquity. — I confess it; but I add another property of His righteousness which you have left aside: since He is righteous, He is satisfied with having been paid once. You say next that I have infinite iniquities which deserve eternal death. — I confess it; but I add what you have maliciously omitted: the iniquities which are in me have been very amply avenged and punished in Jesus Christ who has borne the judgement of God in my place (Rom. 3:25; 1 Pet. 2:24). That is why I come to a conclusion quite different from yours. Since God is righteous (Rom. 3:26) and does not demand payment twice, since Jesus Christ, God and man (2 Cor. 5:19), has satisfied by infinite obedience (Rom. 5:19; Phil 2:8) the infinite majesty of God (Rom. 8:33), it follows that my iniquities can no longer bring me to ruin (Col. 2:14); they are already blotted out and washed out of my account by the blood of Jesus Christ who was made a curse for me (Gal. 3:13), and who righteous, died for the unrighteous (1 Pet. 2:24).

Thereupon, it is certain that Satan will know well to set our afflictions before our eyes, and especially death (Rom. 5:12). He will allege that these are so many testimonies showing that God has not pardoned our sins.

But, as for afflictions, we must reply, firstly: although all affliction and death entered into the world by sin, God does not always have regard to our sins when He afflicts us. We establish this from the whole history of Job and elsewhere (John 9:3; 1 Pet. 2:19; 3:14; James 1:2). But He has several other ends in view which tend to His glory and our profit, as we shall explain further on.

On the other side, when God afflicts His own for their sins, even if He comes to make them feel the pains of death (Job 13:15), He is not provoked to anger

against them as a Judge, to condemn them, but as a Father who is chastising His children in order to prevent them from perishing (2 Cor. 6:9; Heb. 12:6; 2 Sam. 7:14), or to give an example to others (2 Sam. 12:13,14).

The remedy which faith alone finds in Jesus Christ alone against the second assault of the first temptation: "We are destitute of the righteousness which God justly demands from us"

Here is the second assault that Satan can raise against us on account of our unworthiness: It is not sufficient to have no sin, or to have satisfied for sins. But more is necessary; that man should fulfil all the Law, that is to say, that he love God perfectly and his neighbour as himself (Deut. 17:26; Gal. 3:10-12; Matt. 22:37-40). Bring therefore this righteousness, Satan will say to our poor conscience, or know well that you cannot escape the wrath and curse of God.

Now, against this assault, what will all men profit us except Christ alone? For it is a question of perfect obedience which is never found in any save in Jesus Christ alone. Let us learn therefore here to appropriate to ourselves once more, by faith, another treasure of Jesus Christ: His righteousness. We know that it is He who has fulfilled all righteousness (Matt. 3:15; Phil. 2:8; Is. 53:11). He has given a perfect obedience and love to God His Father, and has perfectly loved His enemies (Rom. 5:6-10) as far as being made a curse for them, as St. Paul says (Gal. 3:13); that is to say, as far as bearing, for them, the judgement of the wrath of God (Col. 1:22; 2 Cor. 5:21). Thus, being clothed with this perfect righteousness which is given to us through faith, as if it were properly our own (Eph. 1:7-8), we can be acceptable to God (John 1:12; Rom. 8:17), as brothers and co-heirs of Jesus Christ.

On this point, Satan must of necessity close his mouth, provided we have the faith to receive Jesus Christ and all the benefits He possesses in order to communicate them to those who believe in Him (Rom. 8:33). The third assault of the same temptation: "The natural pollution, or original sin, which is in our persons, makes God hate us still"

There remains yet to Satan an assault with this temptation about our unworthiness, as follows: although you have satisfied for the penalty of your sins, in the Person of Jesus Christ, and are also, through faith, covered with

His righteousness, you are nevertheless corrupt in your nature; in it there dwells still the root of all sin (Rom. 7:17, 18). How, then, will you dare to appear before the majesty of God who is the Enemy of all pollution (Ps. 5:5), and who sees the depths of the heart (Ps. 44:21; Jer. 17:10)?

Now, in this sphere, we find anew a prompt remedy in Jesus Christ alone. We must rely on Him. Truly we are yet enclosed in this mortal body (Rom. 7:24), so that we do not practise the good that we wish, we still feel the sin which dwells in us (Rom. 7:21-23), and the flesh which battles against the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). This is why, with regard to ourselves, we are still polluted in the body and in the soul (1 Cor. 4:4; Phil. 3:9). But inasmuch as we have faith, we are united (1 Cor. 6:17), embodied (Eph. 4:16; Col 2:19), rooted (Col. 2:7), ingrafted in Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:5). In Him, from the first moment of His conception in the womb of the virgin Mary (Matt. 1:20; Luke 1:35), our nature was more fully restored and sanctified (Heb. 2:10, 11), than it ever was when created pure in Adam; seeing that Adam was made only in the image of God (Gen 1:27; 1 Cor. 15:47), whereas Christ is true God, who has taken to Himself our flesh, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This sanctification of human nature in Jesus Christ is reckoned as ours, through faith. Thus, the remainder of natural corruption which, even after regeneration, still dwells in us, cannot enter into our account (Rom. 8:1-3). Our unworthiness is covered and swallowed up by the holiness of Jesus Christ, which is far more powerful to sanctify us before God than natural corruption is to pollute us.

Remedy against the second temptation: "Have we faith or not?"

In a second temptation Satan will then answer that Jesus Christ did not die for all sinners, seeing that all will not be saved. Let us then have recourse to our faith, and reply to him that in truth, only believers will receive the fruit of this suffering and satisfaction of Jesus Christ. But, instead of disturbing us, this gives us assurance; for we know that we have faith (Rom. 8:15; 1 Cor. 2:12-16; 1 John 4:13). As we have said before, it is not enough to have a general and confused belief that Jesus Christ came to take away the sins of the world. But it is necessary that each apply to himself and appropriate to himself Jesus Christ through faith, so that each concludes in himself: I am in Jesus Christ through faith, that is why I cannot perish, and am sure of my salvation (Rom. 8:1, 38, 39; 1 Cor. 2:16; 1 John 5:19, 20).

Thus, to confirm that we have repulsed Satan in the three preceding assaults of the first temptation, and in order to resist this second, it is necessary to know if we have this faith or not. The means is to return from the effects to the cause which produces them. Now, the effects which Jesus Christ produces in us, when we have taken hold of Him by faith, are two. In the first place, there is the testimony which the Holy Spirit gives to our spirit that we are children of God, and enables us to cry with assurance, "Abba, Father". (Rom. 8:16; Gal. 4:6). In the second place, we must understand that when we apply to ourselves Jesus Christ by faith, this is not by some silly and vain fancy and imagining, but really and in fact, though spiritually (Rom. 6:14; 1 John 1:6; 2:5; 3:7). In the same way as the soul produces its effects when it is naturally united to the body, so, when, by faith, Jesus Christ dwells in us in a spiritual manner, His power produces there and reveals there His graces. These are described in Scripture by the words 'regeneration' and 'sanctification', and they make us new creatures with regard to the qualities that we can have (John 3:3; Eph. 4:21-24).

This regeneration, that is to say, a new beginning and new creation, is divided into three parts. In the same way as the natural corruption, which holds our person captive, both soul and body, produces in us sins and death (Rom. 7:13), so the power of Jesus Christ, flowing and entering into us with efficacy, as coming to take possession of us, produces in us three effects: the putting to death of sin, that is -to say, of this natural corruption which Scripture calls the 'old man', his burial, and, finally, the resurrection of the new man. St. Paul, in particular, describes these things at length (Rom. 6, and almost everywhere else; cf. 1 Pet. 4:1-2).

The putting to death of the corruption, or of sin, is an effect of Jesus Christ in us. Little by little, He destroys this cursed corruption of our nature, so that it becomes less powerful to produce in us its effects: the motions, the consents and the other actions contrary to the will of God.

The burying of the old man is an effect of the same Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12; 3:3-4). By His power, the old man, who has received his deathblow, does not cease to be annihilated little by little. In short, in the same way as the burying of our body is a progression from death, so the burying of our old man is a progression and consequence of his being put to death. To this end the afflictions, with which the Lord visits us daily, greatly

serve (2 Cor. 4:16); He comes likewise with spiritual and physical trials which we must diligently make use of, to put to death more and more the rebellion of the flesh, which fights against the Spirit (1 Cor. 9:27; Gal. 5:17). Finally, for believers, the first death is the completion of this putting to death and burying of sin, for it puts an end to the war of the flesh against the Spirit (Phil. 3:20, 21).

The resurrection of the new man, this man whose qualities and faculties are truly renewed, is the third effect of the same Jesus Christ living in us. Having put to death in our nature that which it had of corruption, He then gives to us a new power and remakes us. Thus, our understanding and our judgement, illuminated by the pure grace of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1: 18), and governed by the new power which we draw from Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:14), begin to understand and to approve that which, previously, was folly to them (1 Cor. 2:14) and, abomination (Rom. 8:7). And then, in the second place, the will is rectified to hate sin and embrace righteousness (Rom. 6:6). Finally, all the faculties of the man begin to shun that which God has forbidden, and to follow all that he has commanded (Rom. 7:22; Phil. 2:13).

These are therefore the two effects that Jesus Christ produces in us. If we experience them, the conclusion is infallible: we have faith, and, consequently, as we have said, we have in us Jesus Christ living eternally.

It is therefore evident that each believer must watch above all to maintain, by continual supplication, this aforementioned testimony which the Spirit of God gives to His own; he must also develop, by a continual exercise of good works to which his vocation calls him, the gift of regeneration which he has received (Rom. 12:9-16). In this sense it is said that he who is born of God does not sin (1 John 5:18), that is to say, he does not addict himself to sin, but resists it more and more, so that he has correspondingly more assurance of his election and calling (2 Pet. 1:10). Since to know this regeneration, it is necessary to come to its fruits. Thus, as I have said, the man, being freed from the bondage of sin, that is to say, from his natural corruption, begins, thanks to the power of Jesus Christ who dwells in Him, to produce the good fruits, which we call 'good works'. This is why we say, and with good reason, that the faith of which we speak can no more exist without good works than the sun without light or the fire without heat (1 John 2:9, 10; James 2:14-17).

END OF ARTICLE

FOOTNOTE:

[1] Macedonius, (4th Century), denied the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. His heresy was condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 381 AD.