

# Justification

*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him who has faith in Jesus. ~ Romans 3:21-26*

**T**HE PURPOSE OF HUMAN EXISTENCE, the reason why we are created, is to share in the very life of God by becoming members of his divine family. This membership in the family of

God makes us heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven. When Adam and Eve fell at the dawn of creation, however, humanity's relationship with God was shattered to its very foundations. Because of original sin, we found ourselves separated from God and totally disinherited. Yet God did not abandon us. He gave us the hope of salvation by promising a redeemer who would justify us before God and restore us to the full measure of divine friendship (see Gn 3:15).

The Church teaches that it is the grace of the Holy Spirit, given initially in Baptism, which has the power to justify human-

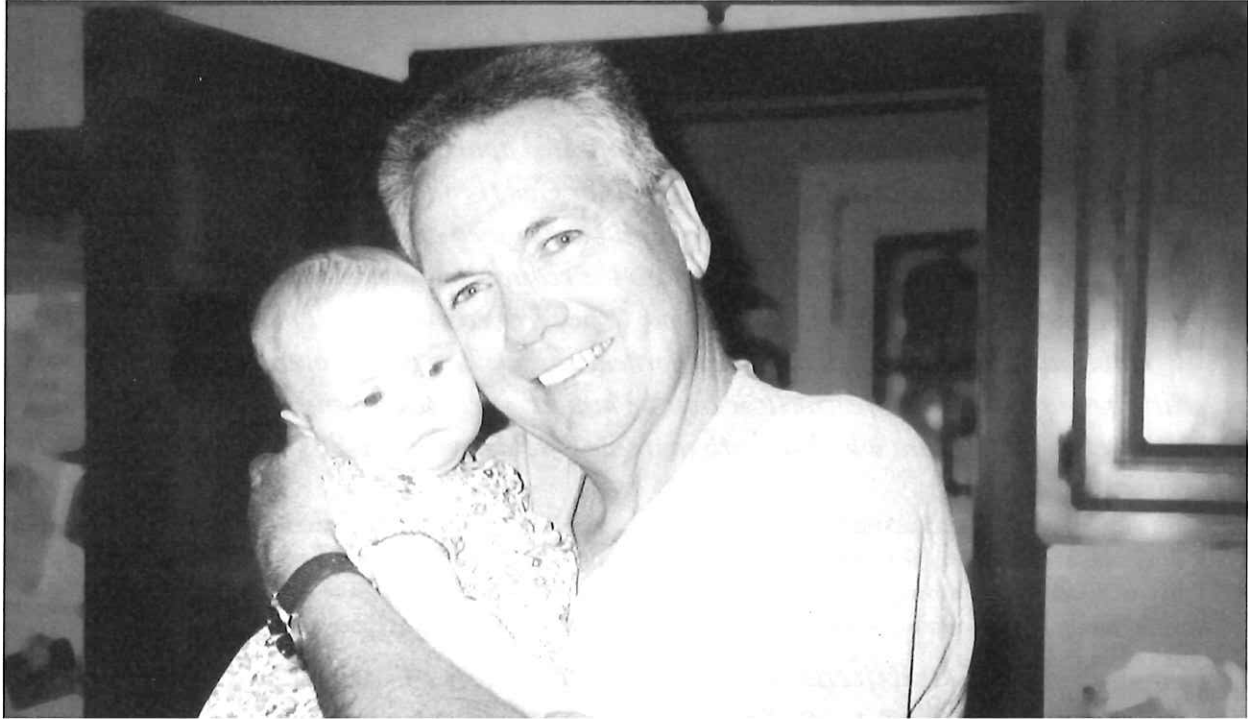
ity. This grace flows from the power of the Redemption that was accomplished once and for all by the saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ on Calvary. Justification, then, flows from and is merited for us by the

*“Justification is the restoration of sinners to friendship with God so that he may adopt them into his divine life.”*



*The Pharisee and the Publican, by Gustave Doré, 1833-1883*

Passion of Christ, and it is accomplished in us at the moment of our Baptism where we die with Christ and are raised up with him. St. Paul expresses this truth very clearly: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:3-4). Thus, at Baptism, we are not simply passive receivers of divine grace, but in a very real and mysterious way, actually participate in Christ's Passion by dying to sin, and in



his Resurrection, by being born to a new life.

Basically, justification is the restoration of sinners to friendship with God so that he may adopt them into his divine life. Therefore, justification is a cleansing of the soul from sin and the communication of *“the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ”* (see verses at beginning of handout). This means that when a person is justified, he or she is newly created and is fully released from the bondage of sin and death that separate the soul from God’s inner life. This renewal and freedom reestablishes in the person a right relationship with God in which *sin is not merely overlooked, but is truly and entirely blotted out* (see Acts 3:19). Hence, the power of Christ’s redemption conquers sin and death totally by wiping it out completely.

Justification also entails a transformation of the whole human person, accomplished by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in Baptism. This sanctification of the Spirit renews us and makes us true sons and daughters of God and heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven (see Rom 8:15-17).

We cannot speak of justification without some mention of freedom. Freedom and justification go hand in hand. Justification enables men and women to cooper-

ate freely with God’s grace. This is expressed by believing in God’s Word that calls the sinner to conversion. To be justified, a sinner must undergo a free conversion of heart which turns him or her away from sin and toward God, thus fulfilling Jesus’ command to *“repent, and believe in the gospel”* (Mk 1:15). A free conversion means that God respects our free will; thus his invitation of forgiveness and grace can be rejected. No one is ever justified against his or her will.

Finally, justification can be lost (see also handout on *Once Saved, Always Saved?*). Just as God does not justify us against our will, he does not prevent us from turning against him after Baptism. St. Paul warns: *“And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard”* (Col 1:21-23). He admonishes us to *“work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Phil 2:12). We

can be confident of God’s unending love and care for us, but we must still seek to do his will so as to remain on the *“hard way”* and enter through the *“narrow gate”* to eternal life (see Mt 7:13-14). (CCC 1987-1995)

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