



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

St. James speaks to us in the second reading today that faith and works must be united. Over the course of the centuries, there has been a debate about whether we believe we are saved by faith or works. Do our works mean anything? Are they the way we get to heaven? Or is it our faith and faith alone that saves us?

If you were to ask many Catholics, you might believe that it is our works that save us. We often hear of the image of the scale: looking to see if our good works out balance our sin. We hear this when we talk about someone being in heaven because of all the good things they did in this life. Even Scripture seems to point to this view, as we read about the Last Judgment in the Gospel of Matthew:

Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food... Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food... (Matthew 25:34-35, 41-42)

Even today's second reading seems to point to this, as James says,

What good is it ... if someone says he has faith but does not have works? (James 2:14)

Many of our Protestant brothers and sisters would reject this belief and say that it is by faith alone that we are saved. They look at the letter to the Hebrews where we read,

But without faith it is impossible to please him, for anyone who approaches God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

They claim that our works, which are filled with such selfishness and sin, could never please God, but only saving faith.

What does the Church teach? The Church teaches that **we are saved by grace, working in love**. Did you catch all that? The Church recognizes that we cannot earn heaven. I'll say that again: *We CANNOT earn heaven!* No matter how much we work, no matter how much good we do, we cannot earn heaven. Why not? Because even one small sin is such an offense an infinitely good God, that it is enough to separate us from Him forever. But

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. (John 3:16)

We are saved by *grace*. It is God's work in us. He came into our humanity to take on our sin, and He broke the power of sin and death by His cross and resurrection. So, we cannot earn heaven... it is a free gift to us from God.

However, the Church recognizes that God has given us free will, and so we must *accept* that gift. We accept that gift by faith working in love (see Galatians 5:6). *Both* faith and works of love. So, our works do mean something for our eternity, but they don't *earn* eternal life. Our good works – done in love (see I Corinthians 13)– allow us to be open to the gift of God's grace. United to the grace of God, our works mold us and form us into Christ – but it is first and foremost from the grace of God.

May we truly be open to the gift of God's saving grace in our lives, and accept that gift by faith working in love.