

CATHOLIC

Q & A

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I'm a good person and I do good deeds. Why do I need to go to Mass on Sunday?

Although you raise issues concerning the natural (good deeds) and the supernatural (the Mass), they need not be separated. One of the main tasks of Satan is to cause division. As a matter of fact, the term devil comes from the Greek word *diabolos*, which means to divide or rend asunder. The devil likes to divide just about anything. Divide the family by splitting the husband from the wife, divide the races by pitting black vs. white, divide the social structure by pitting rich vs. poor, divide the economic structure by pitting worker against management, divide nations by way of nationalism and imperialism etc. etc. So also is the devil at work in the field of theology by separating the natural from the supernatural.

In the 5th century A.D. there was a British monk named Pelagius who taught that man through his own free will was self-sufficient and not in need of God's grace to overcome evil and find salvation. In other words, man by his good works could achieve salvation without the need for God's grace. Pelagius denied Original Sin, which states that man has a fallen nature and is in need of redemption and God's grace to achieve salvation. The Catholic Church condemned the Pelagian heresy at the Council of Carthage in 418 A.D. Jesus Christ, God incarnate said, without me you can do nothing. Pelagianism takes human nature and elevates it to the exclusion of the supernatural by denying the need for transcendent assistance.

So we see that an error can be made in the denial of Original Sin. Conversely, an error can be made by an overemphasis of Original Sin and its effect on human nature. Enter in Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Luther taught that Original Sin had so deeply affected human nature, that man sins in every action that he does. Luther held that a person is

bound to perform good works but they do not bring about an increase in grace and that man cannot become sanctified by God's grace because of his total corrupt nature. If man is totally corrupt then there is no need for the Sacraments or the Priesthood, both of which are designed to communicate God's sanctifying grace and both of which have been jettisoned in Protestant theology. So whereas Pelagius exalts human nature, Protestantism denigrates it.

Catholic theology puts the supernatural and the natural in the right place and the right order without destroying or mitigating either. Original Sin has caused man to have a fallen nature, but not a destroyed nature. Salvation is a free gift from God. Man cannot earn his salvation by good works; he is in need of Christ and the Church for salvation and eternal life. Man has free will and can accept or reject God's grace. Once accepted, man can dispose himself to grow in God's grace and transform himself (sanctification).

With regard to works that we do, the Church teaches that there are seven corporal works of mercy and seven spiritual works of mercy and we should attempt to practice them both. The corporal works are to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned and bury the dead. The spiritual works are to instruct the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, admonish the sinner, comfort the sorrowful, forgive injuries, bear wrongs patiently and pray for the living and the dead.

Prayer is a spiritual work that is the foundation of the spiritual edifice. The highest form of prayer is liturgical prayer (the Mass). St. Padre Pio said that the world could better exist without the sun than without the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. At the hour of your death, the Holy Masses

that you have heard devoutly will be your greatest consolation. Every Mass will go with you to Judgment and will plead pardon for you. Every Mass attended can diminish the temporal punishment due to your sins and afford the souls in Purgatory the greatest possible relief.

We are blessed here at Assumption that we have the Benedictine Monks who celebrate a morning Mass at 6:30 AM on the weekdays. Get up a little earlier and start your day with food for the soul. You won't be disappointed and the benefits are eternal.

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