Introduction: God Has Not Abandoned Man

There is a question that runs throughout the entire history of humanity: What has God done to save mankind?

Ever since sin entered the world, human beings have experienced a profound contradiction. They were created for goodness, yet they are inclined towards evil; they desire happiness, yet they encounter suffering; they long for eternity, yet they discover that their earthly existence is marked by death. Deep within their hearts, they recognise that they are called to something greater than mere survival, but their own strength is not enough to attain what they truly need.

The Christian faith offers an extraordinary answer: God has not abandoned humanity to the consequences of its sin. He has come to meet us in order to rescue us, reconcile us to Himself and restore the supernatural life we had lost.

This divine initiative constitutes what Catholic theology calls the saving work of God. It is not limited to the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross, although this is its culminating moment. It is an eternal design of love that runs throughout the entire history of salvation: it begins with creation, is revealed in the promise made to our first parents, unfolds through Israel, reaches its fulfilment in the Incarnation of the Son of God and continues to be accomplished in the Church through the action of the Holy Spirit, until its consummation at the end of time.

Salvation is therefore neither an abstract idea nor a mere moral teaching. It is a supernatural reality that God freely offers to humanity: the possibility of sharing in His own divine life through Jesus Christ.

Understanding this truth enables us to discover the true meaning of history, Redemption, the sacraments, Christian life and our hope in eternal life.

1. Salvation Begins in the Eternal Love of God

To understand God’s saving work, we must begin with a fundamental truth: God did not create man because He needed something from him.

God is eternal, perfect and infinite, and He is completely happy in Himself. He does not need creatures to complete His existence, nor does He depend on them to attain His fullness. Creation is a free act of His goodness.

The Book of Genesis presents the human being as a unique creature within the whole of creation:

“So God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27).

This statement constitutes one of the foundations of all Christian anthropology. Man is not an accident of matter or a mere organism destined to disappear. He has been created in the image and likeness of God, endowed with intelligence and free will, and called to live in communion with his Creator.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains that God created man in order to make him a participant in His own blessed life (CCC, 1).

Here we find the ultimate origin of salvation: God wishes to communicate His own happiness to man and lead him into communion with Himself.

Supernatural life is neither a human achievement nor a reward that we can demand from God. It is a free gift that infinitely surpasses the capacities of our nature.

Saint Thomas Aquinas develops this distinction by explaining that supernatural beatitude consists in the vision of the divine essence, a reality that exceeds the natural possibilities of every creature and requires elevation through grace.

Man was created for God. That is why no possession, pleasure, social recognition or earthly success can fully satisfy his heart.

Saint Augustine expressed this spiritual longing in one of the best-known statements in his Confessions: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you” (Confessions, I, 1, 1).

God’s saving work must be understood from this perspective: it does not simply consist in avoiding punishment, but in recovering the communion for which we were created.

2. Sin: The Rupture of Communion with God

If God created man to share in His life, an inevitable question arises: why do we need to be saved?

The answer is found in sin.

The account in Genesis presents the Fall of our first parents as an act of disobedience and distrust towards God. The serpent introduces the suspicion that the Creator does not truly desire man's good and proposes a false autonomy: to become like God independently of God.

"You will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5).

The temptation does not consist merely in eating a forbidden fruit. Its theological meaning is much deeper: man attempts to determine good and evil for himself, rejecting his condition as a creature and breaking his relationship of loving obedience to his Creator.

Original sin introduces a profound wound into human nature.

The Catechism teaches that, through the sin of our first parents, human nature was wounded in its natural powers, subjected to ignorance, suffering and the dominion of death, and inclined towards sin (CCC, 404-405).

It is important to understand this doctrine correctly.

The Church does not teach that human beings have ceased to be good by nature or that they have completely lost their freedom. Nor does she claim that every individual is personally guilty of the sin committed by Adam and Eve.

Original sin is a condition transmitted by generation, not an act personally committed by every human being. It involves the deprivation of original holiness and justice, together with a wounded human nature.

This wound is evident in our everyday experience.

We know that we should forgive, yet we often harbour resentment. We recognise the truth, yet we may prefer a lie when it benefits us. We desire to love, yet our selfishness closes us in upon ourselves.

The intellect retains its capacity to know the truth, although it can make mistakes. The will remains free, although it experiences difficulties in choosing what is good. Our emotions can direct us towards good things, but they can also become disordered.

Man's tragedy does not consist merely in the fact that he commits sins, but in the fact that he needs a grace that he cannot give himself.

Saint Paul describes this contradiction in his Letter to the Romans:

“For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (Romans 7:19).

Sin has introduced a separation between man and God that man cannot repair through his own efforts alone.

Nevertheless, it is precisely when humanity discovers its inability to save itself that divine mercy begins to reveal itself more clearly.

3. The Promise of Salvation: God Does Not Abandon Humanity

Immediately after the Fall, a promise appears.

In the account of Genesis, God announces to the serpent that there will be enmity between it and the woman, and between its offspring and hers:

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, while you strike at his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

This verse is traditionally known as the Protoevangelium, meaning the first announcement of the Gospel.

Christian tradition has recognised in these words an initial announcement of Christ’s victory over sin and the power of the devil, as well as a typological reference to the woman associated with the redemptive work of her Son: the Virgin Mary.

The Christological and Marian interpretation of this passage is fully understood in the light of the subsequent Revelation. It should not be confused with an explicit and complete description of all future events, but rather with a promise whose meaning gradually unfolds throughout the history of salvation.

What is truly extraordinary is that God does not respond to sin by abandoning His creatures.

Man hides, but God seeks him. Man disobeys, but God promises victory. Man introduces death, but God prepares the way towards life.

This initiative reveals an essential aspect of the Catholic faith: salvation originates in God, not in man’s efforts to reach God.

From that moment onwards, the history of salvation will be the story of a mercy that patiently prepares for the coming of the Redeemer.

4. The History of Salvation: God Prepares His People

God's saving work does not suddenly appear with the birth of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament constitutes a long preparation for the coming of the Saviour.

God establishes covenants, calls specific individuals, forms a people and progressively reveals His promises.

Each stage reveals a dimension of the divine plan.

Abraham: The Promise of a Universal Blessing

In the Book of Genesis, we encounter the calling of Abraham.

God asks him to leave his land and his relatives and journey towards the land that He will show him. In return, He promises to make him the father of a great nation and to make him a blessing for all the families of the earth.

"In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

This promise is of decisive importance.

The election of Abraham does not mean that God intends to save only one particular people. Israel receives a mission within a universal plan: to prepare for the coming of the One through whom the blessing will reach all nations.

Saint Paul, in his Letter to the Galatians, identifies Christ as the fulfilment of this promise (Galatians 3:8, 16).

The election of Abraham shows that God intervenes in history and calls specific people to collaborate freely in His plan.

Moses and the Exodus: Liberation from Slavery

Another fundamental event is the liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt.

The Book of Exodus recounts how God hears the cries of His people, calls Moses and sends

him to lead them towards freedom.

“I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings” (Exodus 3:7).

The Exodus is one of the great foundational events of Israel.

The liberation from Egypt has its own historical and religious significance, but it also acquires a typological dimension within Christian tradition.

The slavery of Egypt can be contemplated as a figure of slavery to sin, while the journey towards freedom anticipates, in an imperfect and preparatory manner, the definitive liberation that Christ will accomplish.

The Jewish Passover, with the sacrifice of the lamb and the passage from slavery to freedom, also prepares the Christian understanding of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God.

It is no coincidence that the New Testament presents Christ’s death in connection with the Passover.

David and the Promise of the Kingdom

The history of salvation continues with the monarchy of Israel and takes on particular importance with King David.

God establishes a covenant with him and promises that his house and kingdom will endure (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

This promise will nourish the messianic hope of the people of Israel.

The prophets will announce the coming of a descendant of David who will reign with justice, peace and fidelity to God.

Isaiah proclaims:

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

The hope of Israel gradually becomes concentrated on the figure of the Messiah, the

Anointed One of God.

The Prophets: The Hope of a New Covenant

The prophets did not merely announce future events. They also denounced the infidelity of the people, injustice, idolatry and religious corruption.

Their message constantly reminds us that our relationship with God cannot be reduced to external practices.

The prophet Jeremiah announces a new covenant:

“I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:33).

Ezekiel also announces an interior renewal:

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you” (Ezekiel 36:26).

These promises prepare us to understand grace and the action of the Holy Spirit.

Salvation will not consist merely of an external liberation, but of a profound transformation of the human heart.

Man needs to be forgiven, but he also needs to be renewed.

5. The Incarnation: God Enters Our History to Save Us

The fullness of God’s saving work arrives with the Incarnation of the Son of God.

The central event in all human history is neither a military conquest, a political revolution nor a scientific discovery. It is the moment when the eternal Word of God assumes our human nature.

Saint John expresses this with a statement of extraordinary depth:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

The Son of God does not merely send a message from heaven. He does not appear solely as another prophet or as a teacher of wisdom. He truly becomes man without ceasing to be truly

God.

This is the doctrine of the Incarnation.

The Council of Chalcedon, celebrated in the year 451, confessed that Jesus Christ is one Person in two natures, divine and human, without confusion, without change, without division and without separation.

The salvific importance of this truth is immense.

Jesus Christ can truly represent humanity because He possesses a complete human nature. And He can reconcile us with God because He is the eternal Son, consubstantial with the Father.

The Catechism explains that the Word became incarnate to save us by reconciling us with God, so that we might know divine love, so that He might be our model of holiness and so that He might make us partakers of the divine nature (CCC, 457-460).

The Incarnation reveals that God does not save man by despising his humanity.

He assumes our condition, enters our history, experiences weariness, hunger, suffering and death, but without sin.

He is born of the Virgin Mary, lives in a family, works, prays, preaches, calls His disciples and proclaims the Kingdom of God.

Salvation begins to manifest itself visibly in the person of Jesus Christ.

For this reason, Christianity cannot be reduced to a collection of moral values, a philosophy of life or a proposal for social coexistence.

At its centre is a Person: Jesus Christ, true God and true man, the only Saviour of humanity.

6. The Cross: The Redemptive Sacrifice That Conquers Sin

If the Incarnation constitutes the beginning of the Redeemer’s historical presence, the Cross represents the culminating event of His earthly mission.

Jesus Christ did not come merely to teach us how we should behave. He came to give His life for our salvation.

Christ's death was neither an unexpected accident nor the failure of His preaching. It formed part of His redemptive mission, freely accepted in obedience to the Father.

Jesus Himself announces His self-giving:

"For the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

This statement illuminates the profound meaning of the Passion.

Sin is an offence against God and a rupture in communion with Him. Man, by himself, cannot adequately repair this rupture. But Jesus Christ, true man and true God, offers the Father an act of obedience and love of infinite value.

His sacrifice is unique, perfect and sufficient.

The Catechism teaches that Christ's death is both the Paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemption of mankind and the sacrifice of the New Covenant that restores communion between God and men (CCC, 613).

Christ, the New Adam

Saint Paul establishes a fundamental comparison between Adam and Christ.

Through the sin of one man, death entered the world; through the obedience of one man, justification and life came.

"By one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19).

Christ is presented as the new Adam.

Where the first Adam disobeyed, Christ obeys. Where the first man sought greatness independently of God, Christ humbles Himself even to accepting death on a Cross.

This comparison enables us to understand the depth of Redemption.

Jesus is not simply an innocent man who suffers unjustly. He is the Son of God who, out of love, freely assumes the consequences of human sin in order to open the way to reconciliation.

Christ’s Satisfaction and Sacrifice

Catholic theology has developed different aspects of Christ’s redemptive work.

Saint Anselm of Canterbury, in his treatise Cur Deus Homo, reflected on the necessity of the Incarnation and the satisfaction offered by Christ.

Saint Thomas Aquinas explored this question in greater depth, explaining that Christ’s Passion can be considered the cause of our salvation through its merit, satisfaction, sacrifice, redemption and exemplary efficacy (Summa Theologiae, III, Question 48).

These dimensions are not rival theories, but complementary perspectives for understanding the same mystery.

Christ makes satisfaction for our sins through His loving self-giving, offers the perfect sacrifice to the Father, rescues us from slavery to sin and shows us the way of obedience.

The Cross simultaneously reveals the gravity of sin and the immensity of God’s love.

There is no deeper demonstration of how destructive sin is than the Passion of Christ, nor a more extraordinary manifestation of divine mercy than the sacrifice of Calvary.

7. The Resurrection: The Definitive Victory over Death

God’s saving work does not end on Good Friday.

If Jesus Christ had remained in the tomb, His death would not have been the definitive victory proclaimed by the Gospel.

Christianity proclaims a fundamental historical and supernatural event: Jesus Christ truly rose from the dead.

Saint Paul expresses this with absolute clarity:

“And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14).

The Resurrection is not a metaphor for the survival of Jesus’ ideas, nor a symbolic way of expressing that His message remains alive.

The Catholic faith affirms that Christ rose bodily, that His body was transformed and that He entered a glorified condition that surpasses the possibilities of earthly life.

The Gospels present the empty tomb and the appearances of the Risen Christ to His disciples. Saint Paul also records an ancient tradition concerning Christ's appearances, including those to Cephas, the Twelve and many brothers (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

The Resurrection confirms the divine identity of Jesus Christ, manifests His victory over sin and death, and constitutes the foundation of our hope.

Saint Paul explains:

"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 15:20).

The expression first fruits is particularly significant.

Jesus' Resurrection is not an isolated event, but the beginning of the new creation. What has happened in Christ is destined to reach those who belong to Him.

Christian salvation does not consist in definitively escaping the body in order to live as disembodied spirits. Catholic hope includes the resurrection of the flesh.

The Creed itself proclaims:

"I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting."

Death will not have the final word.

8. The Ascension and Pentecost: Christ Continues His Work in the Church

After His Resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared to His disciples and instructed them about the Kingdom of God.

Finally, He ascended into heaven.

The Ascension does not mean that Christ has abandoned humanity or that He has ceased to act in history.

It means His definitive entry, also as man, into the glory of the Father. His glorified humanity shares in divine glory and remains united forever to His Person.

The Catechism teaches that Jesus Christ, Head of the Church, precedes us into the glorious Kingdom of the Father so that we, the members of His Body, may live in the hope of one day being with Him (CCC, 659-667).

Before ascending, Jesus entrusts His disciples with a mission:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).

The Church thus receives the mandate to proclaim the Gospel and make the fruits of Redemption available to all mankind.

However, this mission cannot be accomplished exclusively through human abilities.

That is why Christ promises to send the Holy Spirit.

At Pentecost, the Spirit descends upon the apostles and strengthens them to proclaim the Resurrection of the Lord publicly.

The Acts of the Apostles presents this event as the beginning of a new stage in the history of salvation.

The Church is publicly born as a missionary community, endowed with the gifts necessary to continue Christ’s mission.

The Holy Spirit does not replace Jesus Christ or inaugurate a different salvation. He makes the work of the Son present and effective in the lives of believers.

The mission of the Church consists precisely in proclaiming, celebrating and communicating the salvation accomplished by Christ.

9. The Church: An Instrument of Christ’s Salvation

One of the fundamental truths of Catholic ecclesiology is that the Church is intimately united to Jesus Christ and participates in His saving mission.

It is not simply an institution invented to organise believers, nor a religious association

created through human initiative.

Christ intended to establish the Church and constituted her as His Mystical Body.

Saint Paul develops this image extensively in his letters. Christians are members of one body whose head is Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Colossians 1:18).

The Second Vatican Council, in its Dogmatic Constitution Lumen gentium, teaches that the Church is in Christ like a sacrament, that is, a sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the entire human race (LG, 1).

This statement enables us to understand why the Church cannot be separated from the saving work.

Christ is the only Mediator and Saviour. The Church does not add a different redemption to His, but receives from Him the mission and the means to communicate it.

The Church is holy through her origin, her gifts and her union with Christ, although her members, including her ministers, constantly need conversion and purification.

For this reason, the sins of Christians must not be confused with the holiness of Christ or used to deny the supernatural nature of the Church.

At the same time, the holiness of the Church cannot become an excuse for concealing the sins of her members. Truth requires us to acknowledge wrongdoing, ask forgiveness, repair the harm and work towards genuine spiritual renewal.

The Church is holy and needs purification because she is made up of men and women who are still making their pilgrimage towards the fullness of salvation.

Her mission is not to offer an adapted version of the Gospel according to the expectations of each age, but to faithfully transmit what she has received from her Lord.

10. The Sacraments: The Ordinary Means Through Which We Receive Grace

The salvation accomplished by Christ does not remain a distant event from the past.

God has chosen to communicate its fruits to mankind through visible signs that produce the

grace they signify: the sacraments.

The Catechism defines the sacraments as efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, through which divine life is dispensed to us (CCC, 1131).

There are seven:

- Baptism.
- Confirmation.
- Eucharist.
- Penance or Reconciliation.
- Anointing of the Sick.
- Holy Orders.
- Matrimony.

Each has a specific purpose within Christian life.

Baptism: Birth into Supernatural Life

Baptism is the gateway to sacramental life.

Through it, man is freed from sin, reborn as an adopted child of God, incorporated into Christ and becomes a member of the Church.

Jesus Himself teaches:

“Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

The Church also baptises children because salvation is a free gift that does not depend on the personal merits of the recipient.

Baptism imprints a sacramental character that remains forever and cannot be repeated.

Confirmation: The Strength of the Holy Spirit

Confirmation perfects baptismal grace and strengthens the Christian through a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

It enables the believer to bear witness to Christ and defend the faith with greater firmness.

It is not merely a ceremony marking social maturity or a symbolic decision to belong to the Church.

It is a true sacrament that communicates divine grace.

The Eucharist: The Sacrifice and Food of Our Salvation

The Eucharist occupies a central place in the life of the Church.

In it, Christ's sacrifice, offered once and for all on Calvary, becomes sacramentally present.

The Mass does not repeat the Crucifixion or add a new sacrifice to Christ's sacrifice. It makes the one redemptive sacrifice sacramentally present.

The Council of Trent taught this doctrine in response to the controversies that arose during the Protestant Reformation, affirming the identity of the victim and the principal offerer in both the sacrifice of the Cross and the Eucharistic sacrifice, although the manner of offering differs.

In the Eucharist, we truly receive the Body and Blood of Christ under the appearances of bread and wine.

Jesus had announced:

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever" (John 6:51).

The Eucharist nourishes supernatural life, strengthens charity and unites the believer more deeply with Christ.

It is not a mere communal remembrance or an empty symbol. It is the sacrament of the real presence of Our Lord.

Penance: The Mercy That Restores the Sinner

Sin committed after Baptism can destroy or seriously weaken the life of grace.

But Christ has chosen to offer the baptised a sacramental path of reconciliation.

After His Resurrection, He said to the apostles:

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:23).

The Church recognises in these words the institution of the Sacrament of Penance.

Through sincere confession of sins, contrition, the firm purpose of amendment and sacramental absolution, the sinner receives God’s forgiveness and reconciliation with the Church.

Confession is not a humiliating practice, but an encounter with divine mercy that requires sincerity and conversion.

The other sacraments also participate in this work of sanctification, accompanying the Christian through the different circumstances and vocations of life.

Through the sacraments, the salvation accomplished historically by Christ is truly communicated to men and women of every age.

11. Grace: God Transforms Man from Within

One of the most important concepts for understanding God’s saving work is that of grace.

Grace is not simply a religious emotion, a feeling of comfort or psychological assistance.

It is a supernatural and free gift through which God makes us participants in His divine life.

The Catechism distinguishes different forms of grace, particularly sanctifying or habitual grace and actual graces (CCC, 1996-2005).

Sanctifying Grace

Sanctifying grace is a stable gift that perfects the soul and enables it to participate in supernatural life.

Through it, we are elevated to the condition of God’s adopted children.

Saint Peter uses an expression of extraordinary theological depth:

“That you may become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

This participation does not mean that man becomes God by nature or that the distinction between Creator and creature disappears.

It means that God freely communicates a real participation in His life to us, elevating our nature beyond its natural possibilities.

The Greek Fathers developed this doctrine extensively under the concept of theosis, or divinisation.

Saint Athanasius of Alexandria, in his work On the Incarnation of the Word, explains the purpose of the Incarnation in relation to humanity's participation in divine life.

This doctrine constitutes one of the most beautiful expressions of Christian tradition: God becomes man so that man, through grace, may participate in His life.

Actual Graces

Actual graces are supernatural helps that God grants to enlighten the intellect and strengthen the will so that we may do good and attain salvation.

An inspiration to abandon a sin, the strength to forgive, the decision to go to confession or perseverance in prayer may be occasions in which actual grace acts in a Christian's life.

Grace does not destroy freedom.

God does not transform man into a passive instrument or mechanically impose goodness upon him. He moves man while respecting his rational nature and freedom.

For this reason, Christian life requires a personal response.

12. Faith and Works: What Role Does Our Freedom Play in Salvation?

This is one of the most important subjects and, at the same time, one of the most frequently misunderstood.

Does God save us freely, or do we need to perform good works?

The Catholic answer avoids two opposite errors.

The first consists in thinking that man can save himself through his own strength, accumulating natural merits until he attains eternal life.

The second consists in believing that grace makes any human cooperation unnecessary and that good works have no importance.

Catholic doctrine affirms that salvation is a free gift from God, received by grace through faith, and that this faith is called to work through charity.

Saint Paul writes:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

But the same apostle immediately adds:

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

Both verses must be read together.

Good works are not the initial cause of our justification. They are the fruit of grace and the expression of a living faith.

Saint James explains this with a forceful statement:

“Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:17).

There is no contradiction between Paul and James.

Paul combats the claim that salvation can be attained through works of the Law considered as the foundation of justification, while James denounces a merely verbal faith that does not transform one’s conduct.

Authentic faith produces charity.

The Council of Trent, in its Decree on Justification, taught that the beginning of salvation comes from God’s grace, that justification is not obtained through previous merits and that man, moved by grace, can freely cooperate with it.

This cooperation does not mean that God and man are two independent causes that contribute equal parts to salvation.

God is always the origin of grace and the One who makes our response possible.

Even our supernatural merits are possible because God acts first within us.

The Catechism explains that the initiative belongs to God in the order of grace, but that it requires man's free response (CCC, 2001-2002).

Christian life is therefore a collaboration between divine grace and human freedom, in which primacy always belongs to God.

13. The Virgin Mary in God's Saving Work

No reflection on the history of salvation would be complete without contemplating the unique place of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

God chose that the Incarnation of His Son should take place with the free consent of a woman.

In the Gospel of Saint Luke, we find the announcement of the angel Gabriel and Mary's response:

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

This consent constitutes a fundamental moment in the history of salvation.

Mary is neither the cause of Redemption nor a mediator independent of Christ. Jesus Christ is the one Redeemer and Mediator between God and men.

Nevertheless, God chose to associate Mary in a unique way with the work of her Son.

The Second Vatican Council, in Lumen gentium, dedicates an entire chapter to the Blessed Virgin and explains her maternal cooperation in the work of the Saviour (LG, 52-69).

Mary cooperates through her faith, obedience and union with Christ.

Her participation does not diminish the unique mediation of Jesus Christ, but depends entirely upon it and manifests its efficacy.

Christian tradition has established a comparison between Eve and Mary.

Through her disobedience, Eve participates in the Fall of humanity; through her obedience, Mary welcomes the Saviour.

Saint Irenaeus of Lyons developed this relationship in his work Against Heresies, presenting Mary's obedience as corresponding to Eve's disobedience.

For this reason, tradition contemplates her as the new Eve.

At the foot of the Cross, Mary remains united to her Son at the culminating moment of His sacrifice.

Her presence manifests a fidelity that does not disappear in the face of suffering.

For Christians, Mary is also a model of welcoming grace.

Her life teaches us that holiness does not consist in imposing ourselves upon God, but in surrendering ourselves confidently to His will.

14. The Universal Dimension of Salvation: Christ Came for Everyone

God's saving work has a universal dimension.

Christ did not come only for one people, one culture or one historical period.

His redemptive sacrifice possesses a universality that reaches all humanity.

Saint Paul states:

"God our Saviour […] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

This universal salvific will does not mean that all men are automatically saved, regardless of their decisions and their relationship with God.

The Church teaches that God offers everyone the possibility of participating, in a manner known to Him, in the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

The Second Vatican Council states in Gaudium et spes that Christ died for all and that man's ultimate vocation is indeed one, namely, divine (GS, 22).

This teaching enables us to understand the relationship between the necessity of Christ and the salvation of those who do not explicitly know the Gospel.

The Church proclaims that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour and that the fullness of the means of salvation is found in her.

At the same time, she recognises that God can lead towards salvation those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ and His Church, provided that they sincerely seek God and, under the influence of grace, strive to fulfil His will as known through the dictates of their conscience.

This possibility does not mean that all religions are equivalent or that revealed truth is irrelevant.

Nor does it make evangelisation unnecessary.

On the contrary, the universal salvific will of God constitutes a fundamental reason for proclaiming the Gospel to all peoples.

The Church evangelises not because she despises those who do not yet know Christ, but because she knows that in Him is found the fullness of truth and life.

15. Salvation and Eternal Life: Man's Ultimate Destiny

God's saving work does not end with physical death.

Its purpose is to lead man into eternal communion with God.

Christianity does not regard earthly life as an absurd reality that must simply be endured until it disappears. It sees it as a time of pilgrimage during which we receive grace, respond to God and prepare ourselves for eternal life.

Jesus promises:

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" (John 14:2).

Eternal life is not simply an existence without end.

It consists fundamentally in full participation in the blessedness of God.

Catholic theology calls the direct contemplation of God by the blessed the Beatific Vision.

The Catechism teaches that those who die in God's grace and friendship and are perfectly purified live for ever with Christ and are like God, because they see Him as He is (CCC, 1023-1029).

The Particular Judgement

The Church teaches that immediately after death, each person receives in his or her immortal soul eternal retribution in a particular judgement.

This judgement determines the person's definitive relationship with God: immediate entrance into heavenly beatitude, possibly after purification, or eternal condemnation.

It is not an arbitrary sentence, but the manifestation of the truth of our lives before God.

Purgatory

Those who die in God's grace and friendship, but still need purification, may attain it through purgatory.

Purgatory is not a second opportunity for those who have definitively rejected God.

It is the final purification of the elect, who are already assured of their salvation.

Catholic doctrine teaches that the souls in purgatory are destined for heaven, although they need to be purified before entering into full communion with God.

For this reason, the Church offers suffrages for the deceased, especially the Eucharistic sacrifice, prayers and works of charity.

Hell

The existence of hell constitutes a serious teaching of the Catholic faith.

Jesus Himself repeatedly warns about the possibility of damnation.

Hell consists of eternal separation from God, as a consequence of dying in mortal sin without repentance and without accepting divine mercy.

It should not be presented as a threat invented to control people, but as a reality connected with the gravity of sin and the respect God has for human freedom.

The Church teaches that God desires the salvation of all, but He does not force anyone to accept His love.

The Final Resurrection

Christian hope will culminate in the resurrection of the bodies and the consummation of all things in Christ.

Humanity is not destined to remain forever in a state of separation between body and soul.

God will bring His creative and redemptive work to fulfilment.

The Book of Revelation expresses this hope through the vision of a new heaven and a new earth:

“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more” (Revelation 21:4).

This is the ultimate horizon of God’s saving work: a renewed creation and the eternal communion of the redeemed with God.

16. God’s Saving Work in the Face of the Challenges of the Modern World

Speaking about salvation today may seem strange in a society that has developed enormous confidence in its scientific, technological and economic capabilities.

Modern man possesses instruments that previous generations could scarcely have imagined.

He can communicate instantly with people thousands of kilometres away, extend life expectancy, access immense quantities of information and transform his surroundings through science.

Nevertheless, technological progress has not eliminated the fundamental questions of existence.

We continue to experience death, suffering, loneliness, injustice, fear and the inability to love perfectly.

Technology can facilitate communication, but it does not guarantee communion between people. Medicine can fight numerous diseases, but it cannot definitively abolish death. Material well-being can improve living conditions, but it cannot by itself provide eternal happiness.

Man can transform many things around him, but he cannot redeem himself.

This statement is not intended to despise human achievements. The Church recognises the legitimacy of science, culture, work and progress when they are directed towards the true good of the human person.

The problem arises when man turns his abilities into a kind of alternative salvation.

When Salvation Is Confused with Well-Being

One of the temptations of our time is to reduce salvation to achieving a comfortable, healthy and emotionally satisfying life.

Religion can end up becoming an instrument for feeling good, avoiding worries or obtaining certain personal results.

But Jesus Christ did not promise an existence free from suffering.

He taught us to take up our cross and follow Him:

“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24).

Christian life does not consist in eliminating every difficulty, but in learning to live through them united to Christ.

Suffering is not good in itself and should not be sought for its own sake. Nevertheless, when united to the Passion of the Lord, it can acquire a supernatural meaning and become an opportunity for spiritual growth.

When Christianity Is Reduced to Human Morality

Another difficulty consists in presenting Christianity exclusively as an ethical proposal.

It is evident that the Gospel contains fundamental moral teachings: loving our neighbour, forgiving, practising justice, defending the weak and living charity.

But these demands do not, in themselves, constitute the whole of Christianity.

If we eliminate the Incarnation, the Cross, the Resurrection, grace and the sacraments, we end up reducing the faith to a moral philosophy that could exist without any need for Jesus Christ.

God’s saving work reminds us that Christianity does not consist merely in trying to become better people.

It consists in receiving a new life from God and allowing that life to transform our intellect, our will, our emotions and our actions.

When Awareness of Sin Is Lost

Contemporary culture tends to interpret many behaviours exclusively from psychological, social or cultural perspectives.

These perspectives can provide valuable insights, but they do not replace the moral and spiritual dimension of the human person.

If awareness of sin disappears, understanding the need for Redemption also becomes weaker.

Those who believe they do not need forgiveness will find it difficult to understand the greatness of divine mercy.

For this reason, Catholic preaching must preserve the balance between truth and mercy.

We cannot speak of God’s love while concealing the reality of sin, but neither can we proclaim sin without showing the way to forgiveness.

The Church must proclaim the complete truth: man is a sinner, but God loves him; he needs to convert, but grace sustains him; he has been wounded by sin, but Christ has conquered.

17. How to Participate Personally in God’s Saving Work

Salvation is a divine initiative, but it does not remain a reality external to our existence.

Every Christian is called to respond personally to grace.

This response is not limited to extraordinary moments or intense religious experiences. It is built through an everyday life directed towards God.

Living in a State of Grace

The first commitment consists in preserving and nourishing the supernatural life received in Baptism.

This requires avoiding sin, practising the virtues and approaching the Sacrament of Penance when necessary.

Christians must not become accustomed to living peacefully alongside those things that destroy their friendship with God.

Conversion does not consist in attaining immediate perfection, but in maintaining a sincere disposition to abandon sin and grow in holiness.

Nourishing Our Interior Life Through Prayer

Prayer is indispensable for anyone who wishes to live united to Christ.

It does not simply consist of repeating words, but in establishing a filial relationship with God.

Prayer allows us to listen to His Word, recognise our weaknesses, give thanks for His gifts and ask for the grace necessary to persevere.

The spiritual tradition of the Church recommends daily prayer, meditation on Sacred Scripture, the recitation of the Holy Rosary and Eucharistic adoration.

The Christian’s external life needs to be sustained by an authentic interior life.

Participating Worthily in Holy Mass

The Eucharist must occupy a central place in Catholic life.

Participation in Sunday Mass and Masses on holy days of obligation constitutes a fundamental obligation for the faithful, according to the Church's regulations.

But we should not regard it merely as an obligation.

It is the sacramental encounter with Christ's sacrifice and His Real Presence.

To participate worthily means to attend with faith, attention, recollection and an appropriate interior disposition, striving to live in accordance with what we celebrate.

Practising Charity in Family Life

The family is one of the most important places where the transformation produced by grace must become visible.

Patience with children, marital fidelity, mutual respect between spouses, care for the elderly and forgiveness of offences are concrete expressions of Christian charity.

It would make no sense to receive the sacraments while at the same time living habitually dominated by selfishness, verbal aggression or indifference towards those closest to us.

Holiness is demonstrated not only in great events, but also in everyday faithfulness.

Growing in Knowledge of Catholic Doctrine

We cannot deeply love what we barely know.

Doctrinal formation enables us to understand God's saving work, distinguish truth from error and live the faith with greater maturity.

Reading the Catechism of the Catholic Church, studying Sacred Scripture, learning about the lives of the saints and deepening our understanding of the documents of the Magisterium are excellent ways to grow in faith.

In a society where superficial religious opinions abound, Catholics need a solid formation that enables them to understand and reasonably explain what they believe.

Persevering Until the End

Christian life is a journey of perseverance.

It is not enough to have received Baptism or to have experienced conversion at some point in our lives.

We must remain united to Christ.

Jesus teaches:

“But he who endures to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:13).

This perseverance is not a proud confidence in our own abilities, but a humble trust in God’s faithfulness.

For this reason, we must constantly ask for the gift of final perseverance, remain attentive to grace and avoid any presumption concerning our salvation.

Christian hope is not a superficial certainty that everything will turn out well regardless of our behaviour.

It is the confidence of someone who knows that God is faithful, that His mercy is immense and that He never abandons those who sincerely seek His face.

18. Salvation Is Not Merely Individual: We Are Called to Become Part of the Body of Christ

There is a dimension of God’s saving work that deserves special attention: God does not wish to save man as though he were a creature isolated from everyone else.

Salvation has a personal dimension, but it is also communal and ecclesial.

Christ establishes a Church, gathers believers together and incorporates them into one Body.

The Catholic faith rejects both spiritual individualism and the idea that salvation can be reduced to external membership in a community.

It is not enough to claim that we are Christians because we were born into a Catholic family or because our names appear in parish registers.

Supernatural life requires a real relationship with God, a living faith and a sincere willingness to live according to the Gospel.

But neither can we consider religion an exclusively private experience.

Christians are called to live in communion, participate in the sacramental life of the Church and collaborate in the mission of evangelisation.

This communal dimension is manifested especially through charity.

Saint John writes:

“If any one says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar” (1 John 4:20).

Communion with God necessarily transforms our relationship with others.

For this reason, God’s saving work produces visible fruits: reconciliation, service, justice, mercy, the defence of human dignity and the pursuit of the common good.

The Church cannot limit herself to proclaiming a future salvation while forgetting the real needs of people in the present.

But neither can she replace the proclamation of eternal life with an exclusively social project.

Her mission consists in leading humanity to Christ, the source of all true renewal.

Conclusion: God Has Opened the Way, but Man Must Respond to His Love

God’s saving work is the great thread running through the entire history of humanity.

From creation to the consummation of time, the whole divine plan is directed towards one purpose: to lead man into eternal communion with his Creator.

Sin introduced a rupture, but God promised salvation. Abraham received a covenant, Israel was liberated from Egypt, the prophets announced a new covenant and the Messiah was awaited for generations.

Finally, the Word became flesh.

Jesus Christ lived among us, proclaimed the Kingdom, gave His life on the Cross, rose gloriously from the dead and ascended into heaven. He sent the Holy Spirit and entrusted the

Church with the mission of proclaiming and communicating the fruits of His Redemption.

Through the sacraments, grace transforms our souls and enables us to participate in divine life. Faith opens us to this gift, charity manifests its authenticity and hope directs us towards eternal life.

This entire history reveals a truth that we must never forget: God has done for man what man could never have done for himself.

We cannot erase our sins through our own strength. We cannot conquer eternal life through our natural merits. We cannot definitively overcome death through human progress.

We need a Saviour.

And that Saviour is Jesus Christ.

For this reason, the Christian response cannot be indifference, lukewarmness or a religiosity reduced to external customs.

If Christ has given His life for us, our existence cannot remain detached from that sacrifice.

We are called to live in grace, abandon sin, love God above all things, receive the sacraments, practise charity and persevere in faith.

Salvation is a gift, but it is not a gift that we should despise. It is a call to a new life, an invitation to walk towards holiness and a promise that infinitely surpasses every earthly hope.

In the midst of the uncertainties of the world, Christians can live with a profound certainty: history has not been abandoned to chance, sin does not have the final word, and death is not the ultimate destiny of those who remain united to Christ.

The final word belongs to God. And God’s final word to humanity is a call to life, communion and eternal love.

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

In these words of Our Lord lies the heart of the entire saving work: God has come to seek us, has opened the way back to Him and invites us to remain with Him for ever.

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- 1 Corinthians 15: the Resurrection and Christian hope.
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- Saint Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, especially the questions concerning the Incarnation, the Passion and grace.