

Catholic Monk Preaches Justification by Faith

Ever since I trusted in the Lord Jesus for my salvation, I have endeavored to proclaim the same Gospel message that brought me liberty, forgiveness and eternal life in Christ. My emphasis has always been "justification by grace through faith in Christ alone, apart from the merits of personal works." I appreciate why many Catholics simply dismiss this blessed truth -- since childhood we have been taught that salvation comes through the sacraments, prayer, good works and obedience to the commandments. I had never heard a priest preach free justification by faith in Christ.

But now, for the first time in my life, I was overjoyed to read a Catholic priest, the Capuchin monk Raniero Cantalamessa, proclaim the message of gratuitous justification by faith (St Paul's Faith in Christ [full text](#)). Raniero Cantalamessa is the preacher to the Papal household; he delivered a message entitled "St. Paul's Faith in Christ" on December 16th 2005 before Pope Benedict XVI and other top Vatican officials.

"Salvation is received by faith, and not for works," he said. "Gratuitous justification by faith in Christ is the heart" of St. Paul's preaching, and it is a shame that it is "practically absent from ordinary preaching in the Church."

He suggested that the insistence of Catholic preaching on the "need for good works and of one's personal contribution to salvation" happened as a reaction to the Protestant Reformation emphasis on faith alone. "The result is that the great majority of Catholics have lived entire lives without having ever heard a direct announcement of gratuitous justification by faith, without too many 'buts.'"

The apostle Paul, in his Letter to the Philippians, warned of "the mortal danger" of putting our good works between us and Christ, as if the works would save us.

Fr. Cantalamessa called religious people to "the most necessary conversion for those that have followed Christ and have lived serving him in the Church. A conversion altogether special, which does not consist in abandoning evil, but rather, in a certain sense, in abandoning the good!"

Fr. Cantalamessa told a familiar Italian story about the shepherds near Bethlehem going to visit the newborn Jesus, each of them trying to outdo the others with the beauty of the gifts they offered. One poor shepherd had nothing and was ashamed.

"Mary didn't know how to receive all of them, for she had the Child in her arms. So, seeing the poor shepherd with his hands free, she gave him Jesus to hold. Having empty hands was his fortune, and on another level, it will also be our fortune," he concluded.

Would you also let go of your merits, and with empty hands and a grateful heart receive the free gift of salvation? "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved," is the trustworthy promise of the Bible.