

HOMILY FOR
FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT - MARCH 14, 2021
by Fr. Nick Tran

“Grace Happens”

Dear Brothers and sisters,
Today I want to share with you about God’s grace in our spiritual life.

After high school, Paul wasn’t sure what career he wanted to pursue. He wasn’t even sure if he wanted to go to college at all. **So**, he decided to get a job at the local factory and work until he figured out what he wanted to do with his life.

Paul found working in a factory boring and unfulfilling. **However**, now he had a car payment, a monthly rent payment, and other bills. Though he wanted to find another job, he needed the income. Day by day, he felt more and more trapped by his situation.

It seemed that his only joy in life was the weekend when he could get together with his friends. His life became an endless cycle of working from Monday through Friday and drinking with his friends from Friday night until Sunday.

One Saturday afternoon, while driving to his friend’s house for another party, Paul noticed a bumper sticker on the car in front of him. It said, “Grace Happens”. Although he didn’t know what it meant, he liked it and couldn’t get the saying out of his mind.

While he was at the party, he looked around at his friends and thought about the situation he was in. Nothing was getting any better for him. He was just as unsure about what he wanted for his life as he was the day he graduated from high school. He felt lost and afraid. He knew he had to make a change, but he didn’t know where to start.

That’s when a light went on in his mind. It seemed everything around him stopped and the people around him disappeared. Suddenly, it became clear to him what he needed to do. He had to go back to Church and start praying. It seemed so simple and at the same time made so much sense. He put down his beer, said bye to his friends, went home, and knelt down in his living room to pray. From there, things began to change for him.

Now Paul says he understands that “Grace Happens” bumper sticker. He sees it as God giving him a sign that He was going to step into Paul’s life and give him what he needed to turn things around. It came almost out of nowhere. It wasn’t the result of anything Paul had done. In fact, God was the last thing on Paul’s mind. Nonetheless, God loved him so much that he reached out to him when he was most in need. **“Grace Happens”**

Another Paul had the same experience, but in a more dramatic way. He is Saint Paul who, on the way to persecuting Christians in Damascus, had an encounter with the Risen Jesus who interrupted his plans and changed his life forever. Instead of being the great persecutor of Christians, he became the greatest missionary for Jesus who ever lived. Grace “happened” in Saint Paul’s life, and the world has never been the same.

In today’s second reading, Saint Paul writes, “even when we were dead in our transgressions, [God] brought us to life with Christ - by grace you have been saved.” Our salvation is a precious gift of God. He doesn’t give it to us as a reward for any good we have done. In fact, it is precisely because we are sinners that He comes to rescue us. There is nothing we can do to earn it. It is a simple gift of His great love. The word “grace” comes from the Latin word “**gratia**” which means “**free**” and communicates this idea of God’s love as a rich expression of His mercy to us.

In today’s gospel, Jesus tells Nicodemus, “For 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.” There are many ways that God could have saved us from our sins. **But** He chose to send His only Son. He chose to surrender what was most precious to Him to make it clear to us how great His love for us was.

So when the world seems most dark, when we are most lost, when things seem as though they couldn’t get any worse, that is when “grace happens”. That is when God steps in and makes the way clear for us, gives us strength to go forward, and puts within our reach what seemed impossible.

As with any gift, however, we must accept it and put it to use. We all received the gift of faith through our baptism. We can choose to walk in the light of that faith or put it away somewhere to follow the world’s way. God is at work in our lives through His Holy Spirit inspiring us to choose the path of light that leads to life. We can listen and follow His guidance or ignore it and go our own way. If we walk in God’s way, it will lead to life. If we choose our own way, it will lead to confusion, darkness, and grief. However, whatever we choose, God will not stop loving us. He will not stop trying to disrupt our plans in hopes that we’ll finally smarten up.

God is not watching our lives from afar. He is intimately involved with us at every second of every day. He is close to us. He is near to us whenever we call Him. We don’t have to do anything to get His attention. **Rather**, it is He who is trying to get our attention! We can count on Him, especially when we are most in need. Like a loving Father, He will always give us what we need. His grace will “happen” in our lives when we most need it and when we least expect it.

“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.” God offers His only Son to us today through the **Sacrament**

of the Eucharist. Simple bread and wine will be transformed into **the Body and Blood of Christ given to us**, free of charge, to nourish our souls. This precious gift of God's love is renewed at every Holy Mass, as we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus. Let us receive this gift, then, with gratitude, reverence, and awe. And just as we've received God's love freely, let us give it freely to others, so that God's grace can "happen" in the lives of all we meet.

Bear in mind the word of St. Paul: My Grace is sufficient for you when you feel lost in your spiritual life.