

A Year of Grace



May 2012

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On Pentecost 2012 Australian Catholics begin a 'Year of Grace': a time for all to deepen our relationship with Jesus.

May 2012



This Month...

Tu 1 St Joseph the Worker

We 6 **Easter 5:
Jesus is the true vine**

Th 10 Bl Damien of Molokai

Su 13 **Easter 6:
Love one another**
Mother's Day
Our Lady of Fatima

Su 20 **Easter 7:
Preach the Gospel**

Th 24 Mary, Help of Christians

Su 27 **Pentecost**



In a courageous and humble statement, Australia's bishops have committed themselves to a year-long journey of prayer and repentance. They will each direct their focus and energies on the person of Jesus, with particular emphasis on the contemplation of the face of Christ. They have invited all Catholics to join them in this endeavour to go deeper into the mystery of Christ's love.

www.yearofgrace.catholic.org.au

A Year of Grace

Pentecost 2012 to Pentecost 2013

During this time the Church in Australia "will implore a new sending of the Holy Spirit, who alone can breathe new life into the Church".

What is Grace and how do I get it?

“Hail Mary – Full of Grace”...We say those words so often, but have you ever wondered what they really mean? What is this ‘grace’ and why was Mary full of it?

At its simplest, graces are spiritual strengths given by God to help us live holy lives. These graces are many, like patience, humility, courage, awe, kindness, gratitude, self-control, generosity, serenity, trust and more.

Grace comes to us as a free gift... it is God’s blessing and gift to enrich our lives and strengthen us to live in holiness.

In fact, God is unrestrained in his generosity when it comes to grace. God yearns to bless us with all the graces we need to know his love for us deep in our hearts and to bring his love to others. God’s flow of grace is constant and is not dependant on our worthiness – God gives without discrimination or limit.



So you might ask, if that's so, why do I sometimes lose my patience, fail to be honest or kind or have self-control? Where is God's grace when I am tested by frustration or temptation?

Why, when I need God's grace most, does it seem so far from me?

The answer is that God's grace is a true gift, freely given. It is never imposed on us against our will. God respects our freedom to accept his grace or reject it.

The absence of grace in our lives does not come from God's stinginess, but from our resistance. If we don't have a particular grace, it is not because God is withholding it, but because we are blocking it in some way.



Praying for Patience

For example, when my children were young, I was prone to angry outbursts and bouts of impatience. I used to pray earnestly for serenity and patience, but I really didn't want more patience; I wanted different kids!

Although I asked for patience, what I really wanted was for God to change my circumstances so that my patience would not be tested so much.

Was it any wonder then, that I didn't get the patience I prayed for?

I learnt that if I want a grace, like patience, I needed to ask myself; what blocks do I have to this grace? Then I discover that I am afraid that if I really had more patience, I would be taken for granted; the kids would just go on making a mess, or ignoring my calls, and I would become a doormat.

Once I realised how I was blocking the flow of grace, I could have some real and honest prayer with God about my fears of being overlooked, unnoticed, unappreciated.

**This May, the
Month of Mary**



Get your kit today!

Effective Prayer

This is the kind of prayer that really works. When I pray like this, my heart softens and I become more open to receiving God's grace. God meets me in my vulnerability and pours his love into me, releasing me from my fears so that the patience I need can have the chance to be expressed. It is genuine spiritual growth.

And the more I grow spiritually like this, the more freedom I have to receive even more grace from God.

So Mary is indeed 'full' of God's grace, because she is perfectly, fully, completely open to God. She holds nothing back from God, puts no barriers up, and is utterly receptive to God's grace. This is why she is a role model for us; as one who lives in perfect communion with God and fully open to God's grace, we draw hope and inspiration from her example.

Bringing on the Grace

How do we become more grace-filled? Primarily it is through prayer in all its forms: the Sacraments, both formal and informal personal prayer, meditation, study of scripture, acts of service, penance, and many others.

A particular focus during this Year of Grace is the contemplation of the face of Christ.

It is in Christ's face that we discover the great depths of his love for us. It is in his face that we see his yearning for us to have 'joy that is complete.'

So that my
joy may
be in you
and your
joy be
complete.

Jn 15:11

Contemplation

I remember how with each of our newborn babies, we would spend hours just gazing with wonder and love on them as they slept. There was no 'activity' or talking, just awe and a powerful sense of communion with God's creative power. Contemplating the face (and the body) of Christ is a bit like this: there's nothing to 'do' or 'say'. It's more a sense of just being and resting in Christ's presence.

The Face of Christ

Meditation is the practice of stilling our thoughts so that we can become aware of God's presence. Some people do this through deep breathing and relaxation, consciously letting go of distractions and inviting God into their awareness through a mantra like 'maranatha', which means 'O Lord, come'.

Taize is a form of meditation, where the mantra is sung. The Rosary is another form, where the repetitive prayers allow us to sit with Mary and reflect on an aspect of Christ's life. Having a usual focus such as an icon, holy picture or statue can be a valuable aid to meditation.



If this year we embark on an adventure to seek the face of Christ in new and deeper ways, God knows what gifts of peace and happiness might be in store for us. One thing is certain, that if we do some serious knocking, God will do some serious grace giving.

Authors: Marilyn Rodrigues & Francine Pirola.

Meditation with Children

Children as young as five can learn to meditate silently for a minute or two at a time. It may help them to have a picture or a candle to look at, or to close their eyes as they use a short mantra such as "Come Lord Jesus" or "I love you Jesus."

This is great training for a life of grace and has all sorts of other benefits for them too in terms of aiding greater concentration, relaxation and self-mastery. Some primary schools are already holding regular meditation sessions for children with great success, gradually increasing the length of time with each grade.

For more information:
www.meditationwithchildren.com

Stories of Grace

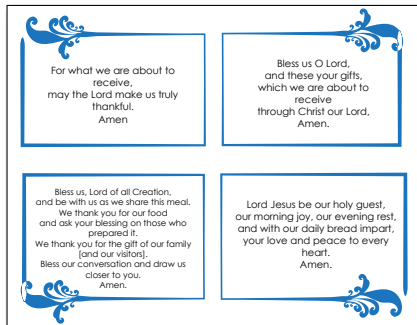
A collection of forty simple stories for children (aged 4-8) to help them connect with Jesus in every day life.

Integrated with a reading log, **My Reading Record 2012** helps children deepen their faith while encouraging good reading habits.



Grace Before Meals

One of the simplest and most effective ways busy families can embrace this Year of Grace, is to establish a routine of prayer before meals. Whether eating alone or in a group, the practice of pausing to acknowledge God's goodness and generosity before we eat grounds us in faith. Click here to download some common meal time prayers.



Couple Prayer

Byron & Francine Pirola

For couples, one way to embrace a Year of Grace is to pray together as a couple. Based in the Sacrament of Matrimony, couple prayer is different to community prayer; it recognises that our intimacy and trust as a couple is directly related to our marital holiness. So the purpose of couple prayer is to **not only bring the spouses closer to God, but to also bring them closer to each other.**

Praying openly and vulnerably together can be quite confronting, so it's best to take it gradually. From wherever you might be starting, just take your couple prayer one more step.

For example, if you've never prayed as a couple, start by simply lighting a candle, holding each other's hand and praying silently. When you feel comfortable with this, try praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Use the sequence as a guide to help you take the next step in couple prayer.

Eight Steps to Deeper Couple Prayer

1. Light a candle and hold hands together for a few minutes. Silently thank God for your spouse.
2. Hold hands and say the Lord's Prayer together.
3. Before praying together, each offer an intention for your prayer, perhaps something about which you are worried or stressed.
4. Before praying together, share when you felt or recognised God's presence today.
5. Before praying together, share how you felt loved by your spouse today.
6. When praying together, add a prayer of thanks for the gift of your spouse.
7. When praying together, add a prayer of sorrow for the times you failed to love this day.
8. When praying together, add a prayer asking for a grace you might need, like self-control, perseverance, kindness, humility etc.

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