

3 Sunday Easter B 2018  
Frazee/Callaway

Think of life from the perspective of an exaggerated individualism.

It is a bit like my great nephew with a package of crackers. You know those little packs of crackers you get with soup at a restaurant? He couldn't get it open. The more he struggled the madder he got. I offered to help. My brother offered to help. His mommy offered to help. He wanted to do it for himself. When he finally got it opened, he was mad because the crackers were nothing but crumbs.

At times, we are all little children. God and God's grace is available to us in our struggles, but we think we can do it ourselves. So, we struggle alone. We take one step forward and two steps backward. Then, when there is nothing left of our lives but crumbs, we are mad and mad at God because he didn't fix it. We feel abandoned and we wonder if faith ever matters.

Pope Francis has been talking of excessive self-reliance. When we trust in ourselves more than in God, then we don't need Jesus. We begin to believe that we can achieve salvations all by ourselves.

A little boy who has to open his own crackers can become the man who believes that if he acts rightly and prays often then salvation is his. Jesus is a model that inspires generous actions with his words and his gestures, but he leaves the work of salvation to us. Our fidelity, our good works, our generosity and our prayers are what opens the door to heaven.

This is an ancient heresy: Pelagianism. I can know what is good and choose to do it apart from God's grace. Pelagius taught that the human person is born without sin and can die without sin. He taught that we are capable of all goodness of our own will and strength. Heaven is mine to earn or mine to lose. If heaven is a cracker inside the bag, I don't need your help. If Heaven has a door, I don't need Jesus to open it, I can do it myself. If we want to be the little boy crushing crackers, God respects our freedom.

Grace is *favor*, the *free and undeserved help* that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life. (CCC1996)

God's free initiative demands *man's free response*, for God has created man in his image by conferring on him, along with freedom, the power to know him and love him. The soul only enters freely into the communion of love. God immediately touches and directly moves the heart of man. (CCC2002)

This vocation to eternal life is *supernatural*. It depends entirely on God's gratuitous initiative, for he alone can reveal and give himself. It surpasses the power of human intellect and will, as that of every other creature. (CCC1998)

The *preparation of man* for the reception of grace is already a work of grace. This latter is needed to arouse and sustain our collaboration in justification through faith, and in sanctification through charity. God brings to completion in us what he has begun, "since he who completes his work by cooperating with our will began by working so that we might will it:"

Indeed we also work, but we are only collaborating with God who works, for his mercy has gone before us. It has gone before us so that we may be healed, and follows us so that once healed, we may be given life; it goes before us so that we may be called, and follows us so that we may be glorified; it goes before us so that we may live devoutly, and follows us so that we may always live with God: for without him we can do nothing.(CCC2001)

Grace for salvation is offered in the Sacraments. It is offered for our fidelity to the demands of Christian charity.

Pelagius and little boys refuse grace for believing they don't need it.

In the first Easter Preface we claim to be *overcome with paschal joy*. Jesus, the author of life lives and he has wiped away our sins.

By our lives may we give witness to the source of our joy: Jesus Christ. Let us humble ourselves so that others know we have accomplished nothing by our own

will and strength. Jesus makes life-giving bread from the crumbs of our lives. He has opened the door to paradise.

So how did it end? My niece opened another package of crackers out of Liam's sight. She put the whole crackers by his plate. He looked at them and smiled. Grace comes even when we reject it. Let God smile on you and you can smile back.