

“Justification” and the related verb “to justify” are funny words.

I’m sure you’ve had to justify yourself before. Especially if you have spouse or girlfriend/boyfriend. Being Father’s day, Let me use this example. Now I love my dad. If my dad wanted something power tools, a snow blower a hauling trailer. He found a way to justify it. He is a wood workerso to justify the latest tool he needed he would wrap it up and put it under the Christmas tree. Who can question him then right? The snowblower: let’s buy the biggest snowblower we can find so everyone would ask, “so is that one pass over the driveway or two? And the hauler, he just wanted it so it was easier to pack for a week at a rented cottage than trying to play tetris in the back of his car. (Thank God we are not broadcasting this morning...)

. Soto justify something (whether a big purchase or some bold statement) is to be put on the defensive. It usually feels acutely negative.

Whoever has used a computer and had to change the margins, you know that justification is about which margin to make straight. Aside from editors and English teachers, no one gets very excited over the subject.

However, in the context of the Church justification is a word with a positive meaning that should be found in every heart. It is an idea that is at the very core of the Gospel and the Church’s understanding of God’s great and merciful love. Unfortunately, it seems all too often that even in the Church people misunderstand what justification is all about.

Justification is complicated! In short, justification is how we are in right relationship with God. Our relationship to God is restored by faith in Jesus Christ.

In today’s reading from Saint Paul’s letter to the Galatians, we hear: “We know that a person is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ... by works of the Law no one will be justified.” It seems to be a straightforward message. We are made right with God by trusting in Jesus Christ to save us. It is something that God does for us when we believe in God’s Son.

Despite knowing what God does for us, you know our sinful pride can get the better of us, I don’t have to tell you that. We begin to think that we have an in with God because we are well behaved and do the right things. We become good people in our own eyes rather than seeing ourselves for what we are, sinners in need of forgiveness. Sometimes, we become convinced that if we put in the effort to fix some of our problems, God will

love us more. The worst version of this bad theology is when people try and fail so much that they start to believe that God could not and would not ever love them or forgive them.

The Good News is that God's love and mercy for us are not dependent on our good works, our feelings, or our failings. God does not love us more because we give money to the right causes or protest the wrongs of the world. God does not love us less because we as broken creatures keep trying to improve ourselves and we still fall short. God does not justify us because we deserve it – we certainly do not – rather God justifies us because God loves us.

We call this gift of God's love "grace." Grace is simply a gift. Grace is God's love freely given. It is something we have not earned and frankly cannot earn, because, as Paul reminds us, if we as sinners could have earned our justification, Christ would have died for no purpose. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the Apostle writes, "By grace you have been saved not by works, and this is so that no one can boast."

Faith is trust that God truly loves us.

The fruit of God's gift of justification then is that we have a new life in Jesus Christ.

We are now free to know, love, and serve God. Our response to God's incredible gift should be to share his love and mercy with the whole world. Amen.