

## **ARE YOU SAVED?**

**(Abba Ephrem Andom)**

A very interesting question that can be asked from different points of views:

I think many of us might have already been asked this question by some enthusiast Christian probably after his/her new religious experience. It doesn't matter to the poser of the question whether you have been a follower of Christ all your life in a different way or style than his/her. If you have been asked such a question, you know that your enquirer is a Protestant of one kind or other. From a Protestant point of view the question simply means **have you received Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour and Lord?** Or it can also mean **are you born again?** Or simply, **"do you have a born again experience?"** From a Catholic point of view, it has an entirely different meaning and it means: **have you made it to heaven?**

Though the experience of being born again is very important, it does not consist being saved in a definitive sense as one can jeopardize his or her salvation with mortal sin. After accepting Jesus as one's personal Saviour and Lord, at a certain point, if someone begins to live sinful life and die in that state without repentance, where does that person's salvation consist in? Thus salvation is not a once for all experience; it is a continuous process. Accepting Jesus as the Lord of my life is vital thing but that one-day decision should not be understood as the final decision of my life; I have to prove the reality of my decision in my daily walk with the Lord.

Thus, Catholics and Protestants have differences in interpreting the question of salvation. What Protestants call their day of salvation is basically what a Catholic may refer to as his or her conversion experience or a new experience of rededicating his/her life to the Lord Jesus. For a Catholic, his/her day of salvation is, the day of his/her death in the state of grace. No doubt, the once for all and the objective, or the universal salvation had already taken place when the Lord Jesus Christ died for the sins of the entire world. Yes, objectively salvation has been obtained for us through the vicarious death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Unless we as individuals accept that salvation with our own free will and decision, the Lord does not force it upon us. Here comes then, the importance of free will; our acceptance of what has already been offered freely to us. We call this subjective salvation, the salvation of us as individual persons. That is the salvation of yours and mine.

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As Catholics, when we speak about salvation, we always remember Jesus' words in the Gospels: *"but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."* (Cf. **Mk 13:13**) One may say, "I have begun my salvation process" or "I am in the way of salvation" after his/her decision to follow Christ or after his/her conversion experience. But how can one say "I am saved" immediately after that experience without even knowing that he/she may abandon the Lord in a few days time? How can one affirm his/her salvation before concluding his/her trip completely? It seems to be an affirmation of presumption. I don't want to accuse or blame most good Protestants who use this phrase without any vicious purposes. But unfortunately there are many Protestants who try to confuse other Christians with the use of this misleading phrase. For many Evangelicals, the phrase is like an acid test to know who is saved and who is not. For them it simply needs a yes or no answer. I wish it were so simple, but it is not.

If salvation were as cheap as to be gained solely by my affirming that I am saved without perseverance to the end, everybody would have been saved just because he/she had said it once in his/her lifetime being convinced of what he/she is saying at the moment convincingly. If one's salvation could be secured because of one-day's affirmation, why should people bother about their daily walk with the Lord throughout their lives in the thick and thin? If it were so easy, why isn't everybody saved? It seems to me that Protestants see salvation from the foot of a very high mountain while Catholics view it from the top of the mountain. One cannot say, "I have climbed the mountain" or "I have made it up to the top" until he/she has actually walked all the way up to the mountain-top.

If I remember it well, one of the greatest Greek Philosophers (probably Heraclitus) said, "the way up and the way down are the same thing". Obviously, the difference results from your position in the way. The way is the same but you can see it from different perspectives. 'Upward' and 'downward' are relative to your positioning in the way according to this saying. But I am not so sure if it can apply in our case here with the question of salvation. I don't think it applies here but if it could, definitely I would prefer to view the way or the mountain from the top instead of from the foot. This may be because I am a born Catholic or it can be probably because I am practical. Whatever it is, I definitely prefer the upper part to the lower one. I want to say "I am saved" at the end of my journey instead of at the beginning of it. Through the precious grace of my Lord Jesus Christ, I have walked so far; at times falling down and bouncing up again. At the moment, the words of wisdom that remind me of my continuous struggle to be faithful to the calling the Lord has given me come from St Paul's letter to the Philippian Christians of his time: *"Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God Who works in you to will and to act according to His purpose."* (**Phil 2:13**)

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There should not be any pride involved in the process of my salvation since it is a free gift from my Lord. All glory should be given to Him. My salvation should be worked out because it is a process and this must be done in fear and trembling for I shouldn't believe my capacity of perseverance. I should entirely be dependent upon my Lord's grace. I must be wise enough to remember what had happened to some of God's 'saved people' when they overestimated their capacities of faithfulness and crumbled down under the sin of pride and presumption. Thus I must co-operate with my loving Lord everyday of my life in the process of my salvation. I don't have any doubts as little as a iota as for the salvation that has been wrought for me by my Lord on the Cross, but I have never trusted my own ability to be immune from sin and consequently the possibility of being separated from Him eternally.

So what is my answer to the simplistic question: "are you saved?" From what I have already said above, you may not expect a simple 'yes' or 'no' from me. My answer to the question is, 'yes and no'. Let me make it easier for you to understand. If you are asking me this question having in mind Christ's salvific sacrifice, then my answer is "yes the Lord has saved me on Calvary". If you mean by that, that because of my decision to follow the Lord or because of my born-again experience I am saved? Don't rush it too much my dear friend! Wait in patience and ask me again when we reach heaven in God's grace. I would prefer to answer those sort of questions when I complete my journey victoriously. Better to say 'I made it' at the mountain-top than at its foot. With the grace and help of our Lord, I wish to see you too up there. Meanwhile I hold to this promise of my Lord firmly: "*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.*" (Rev. 2:10c) Please have a look at the following scriptures also in line with what we have been meditating upon: **Matt 7:13-27; Rom 8:1; 10:9-10; 1Cor 9:24-27** and **Heb 6:4-12**.

Salvation is not simply a moment's experience but a lifetime experience and a constant process of growth in the likeness of Christ which makes it uncertain until it is concluded in attaining to our final destiny – heaven. Therefore, there is a possibility of losing it all after having a wonderful born-again experience and conversion unless it is kept alive in constant and daily surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives. "*Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,*" writes St. Paul (Rom 8:1). Paul is very careful here in putting 'now' in his statement. If I were in the state of grace yesterday and if I am not today, this statement doesn't apply to me; because salvation is a continuous process which should be kept alive in the dynamism of the here and now experience of our daily lives. My yesterday's experience will have meaning today, only if I currently have true and real relationship with my Lord.

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The question here is, "at the moment, are you in Christ? Are you living under His Lordship?" Or in other terms, "has He got you?" If your answer is 'yes' right now, you are not under condemnation. But don't fool yourself being complacent for it is in your power to spill your salvation out of your cup any moment in your life thus losing it all at once. That is why we should be very careful about our salvation which has been wrought for us by the Lord for an incredibly high price – His Precious Blood!

Have you given your life to the Lord and experienced His wonderful love and mercy? And because of that, have you foretasted the joy of heaven on earth? Praise the Lord! I give thanks to the Lord for that with you. But remember that you have just begun the real life in Christ; you have not finished your journey yet. Because of our baptism we have become God's children; and with many different religious experiences we are coming to Him closer and closer, but the end has not yet arrived, or rather, we have not come to the end of our journey. There is a lot to live for and to protect from eternal damage.

St John the Evangelist reminds us of who we currently are in God and what we may be in the future when he wrote: *"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone, who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure"* (1 Jn 3:2-3).

The good news is that we are children of God being saved by Him, but the fullness of our salvation will be complete when we continue to be in that state until the end and receive our eternal reward from Him. Until that moment, we are simply pilgrims towards the heavenly Jerusalem. Yes, we are still in the way of salvation. So, we should stay on track and should stop thinking that we have already concluded our pilgrimage. Let us first cross the finishing line to receive our trophy. In St. Paul's words, let us *"Run in such a way as to get the prize."* (1 Cor 9:24b)