

Merit, Intercession, and Propitiation



The keys to understanding mankind's redemption from sin through Christ, to personal holiness and peace, *and to all things Catholic.*



Moses

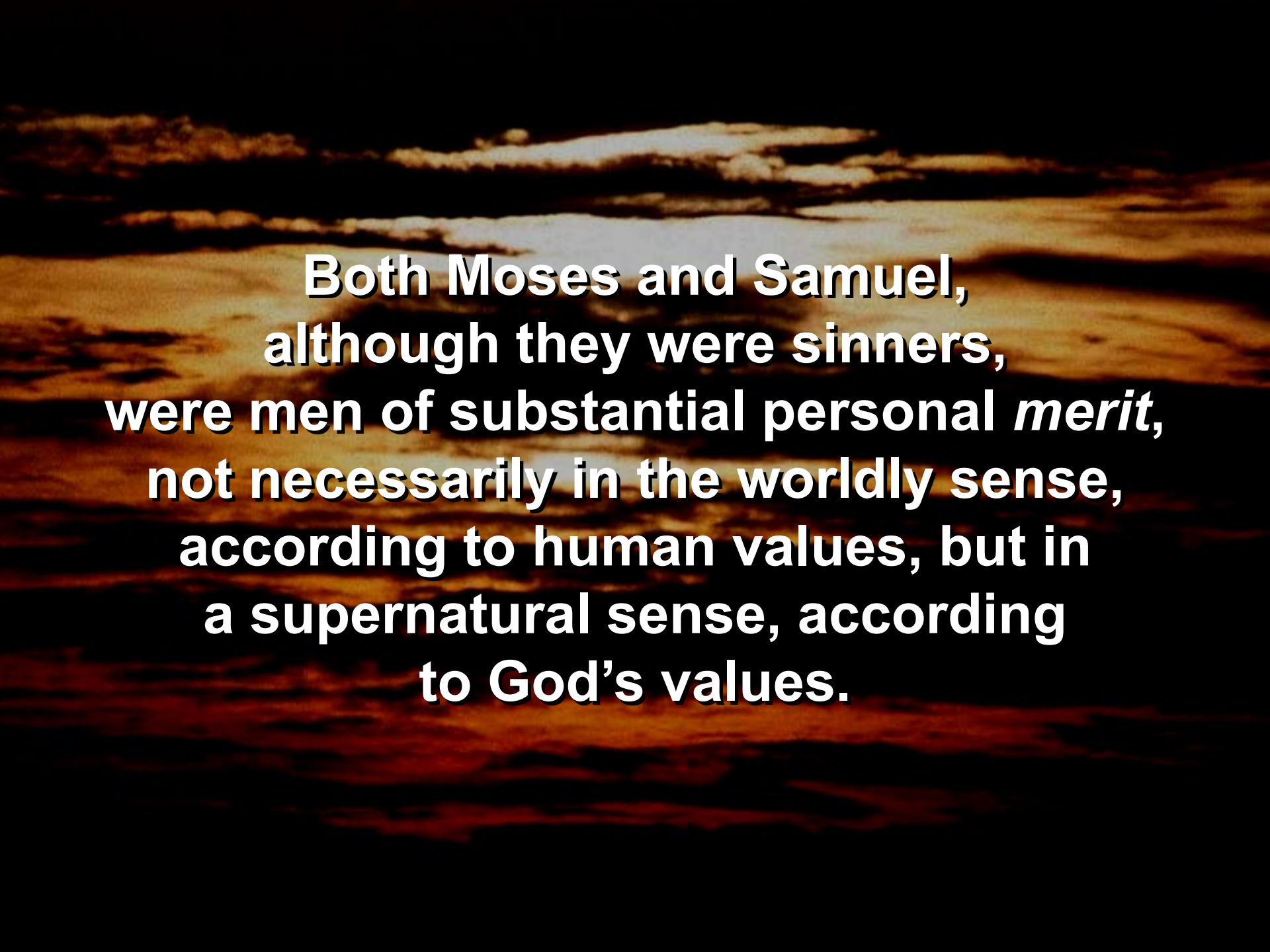
Jeremiah 15:1 And the Lord said to me:

***Even if Moses and Samuel
shall stand before me,
my soul is not towards this people:***
cast them out from my sight,
and let them go forth.



Jeremiah

What was so special about Moses and Samuel that God chose to single them out by name, to His prophet Jeremiah?



**Both Moses and Samuel,
although they were sinners,
were men of substantial personal *merit*,
not necessarily in the worldly sense,
according to human values, but in
a supernatural sense, according
to God's values.**

Definitions (Merriam-Webster's on-line)

Main Entry **MERIT**:

Pronunciation: 'mer-it

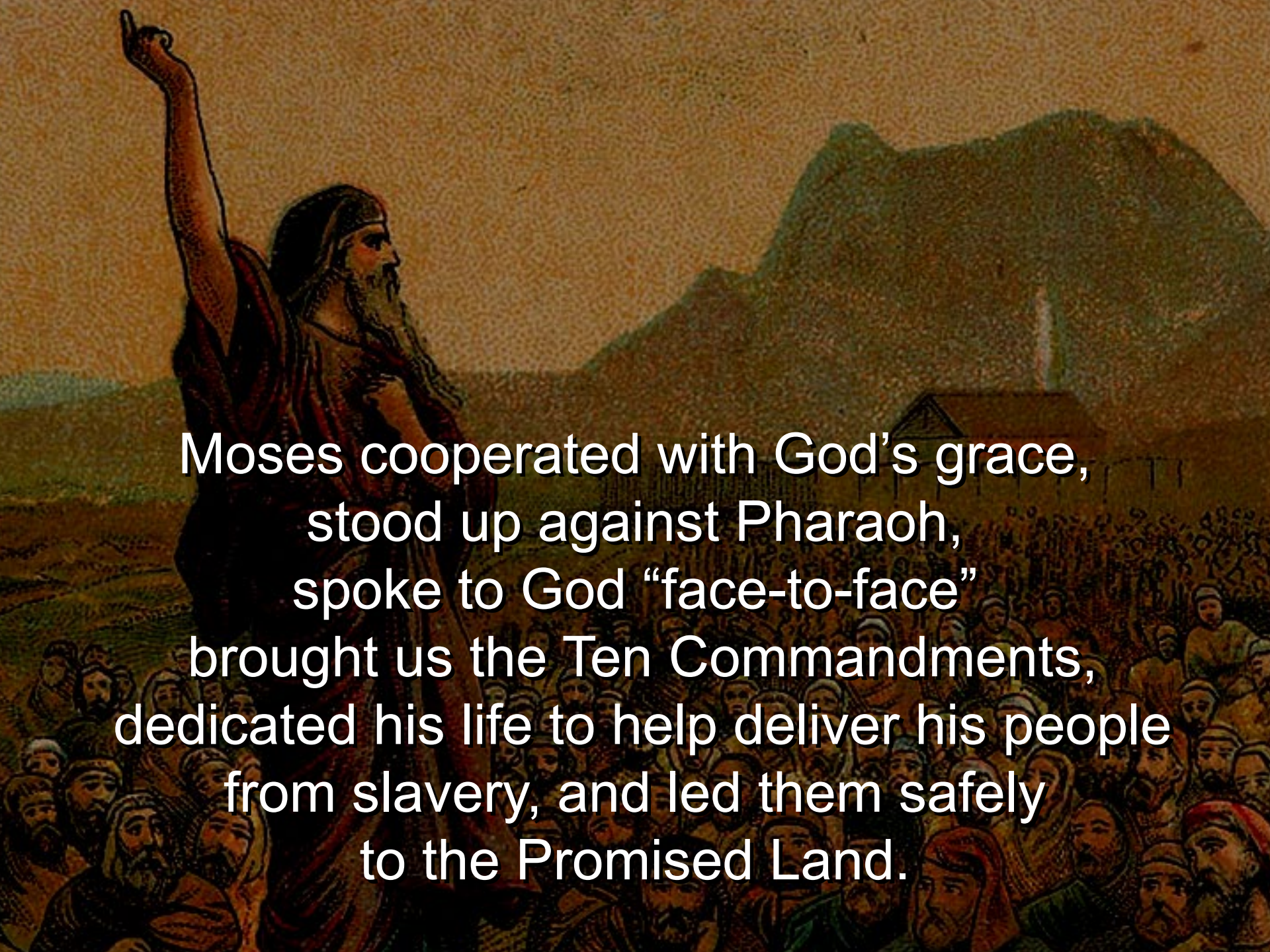
Function: *noun*

**1 a : reward or punishment due b : the qualities or actions that constitute the basis of one's deserts
c : a praiseworthy quality :**

VIRTUE d : character or conduct deserving reward, honor, or esteem;

ACHIEVEMENT

2 : spiritual credit held to be earned by performance of righteous acts and to ensure future benefits.



Moses cooperated with God's grace,
stood up against Pharaoh,
spoke to God "face-to-face"
brought us the Ten Commandments,
dedicated his life to help deliver his people
from slavery, and led them safely
to the Promised Land.



Samuel

(anointing David, Israel's second king)

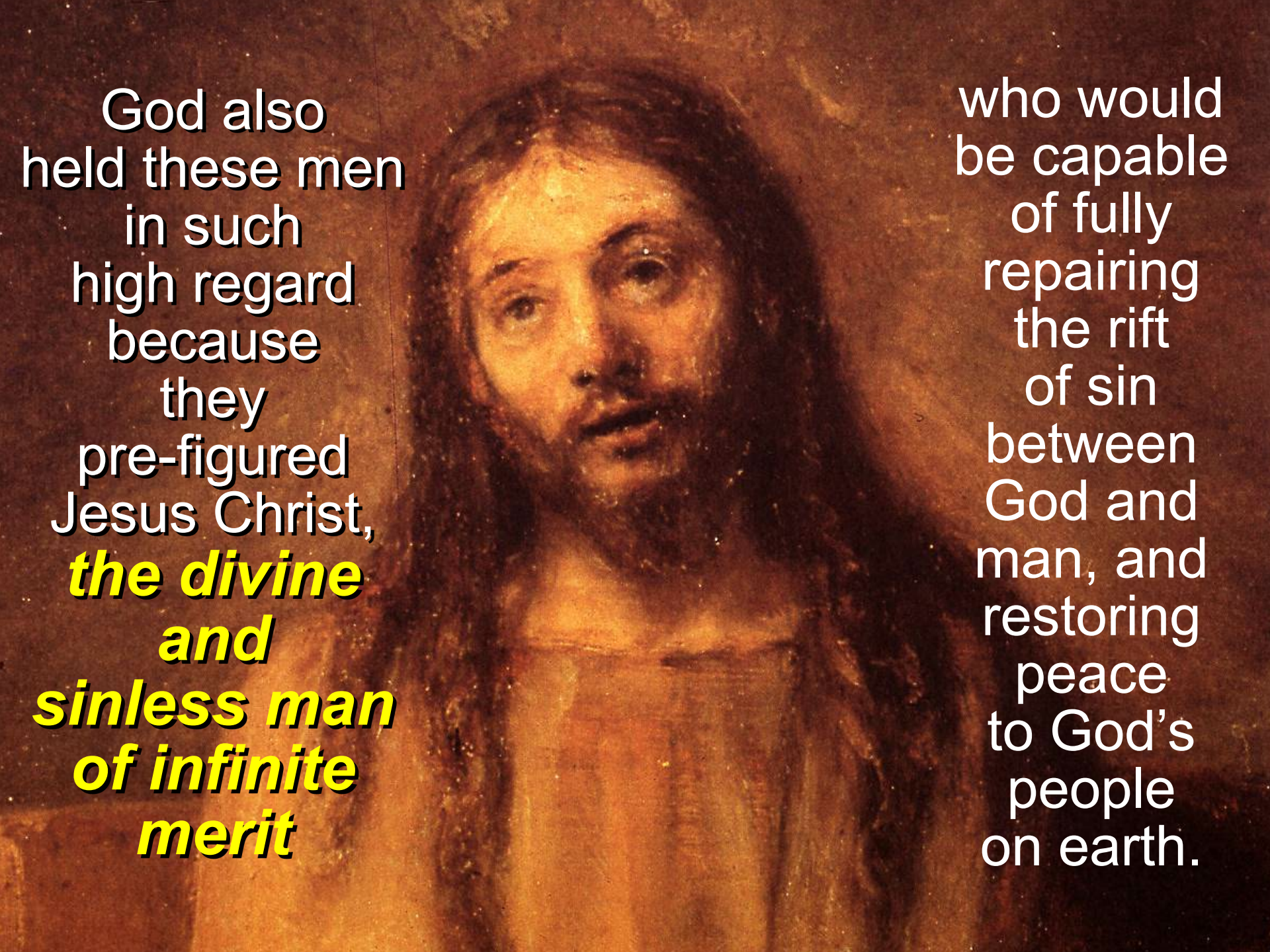
Samuel was a holy prophet whose life was dedicated to God's service from birth. God spoke to him at a young age, ***preparing him to intercede for the people of Israel*** and anoint their kings, most notably, David, the king who established the "royal house" of which **Jesus Christ** is the eternal and everlasting ruler.

We're not speaking about salvation or justification here, but of **merit**:
The specific personal characteristics, strengths, weaknesses, talents, or lack of same, that each of these men possessed, and the faith they showed by responding positively to God's grace.

The choices these men made, the faith they exhibited, and the tasks they accepted, endeared them to God in a very special way.

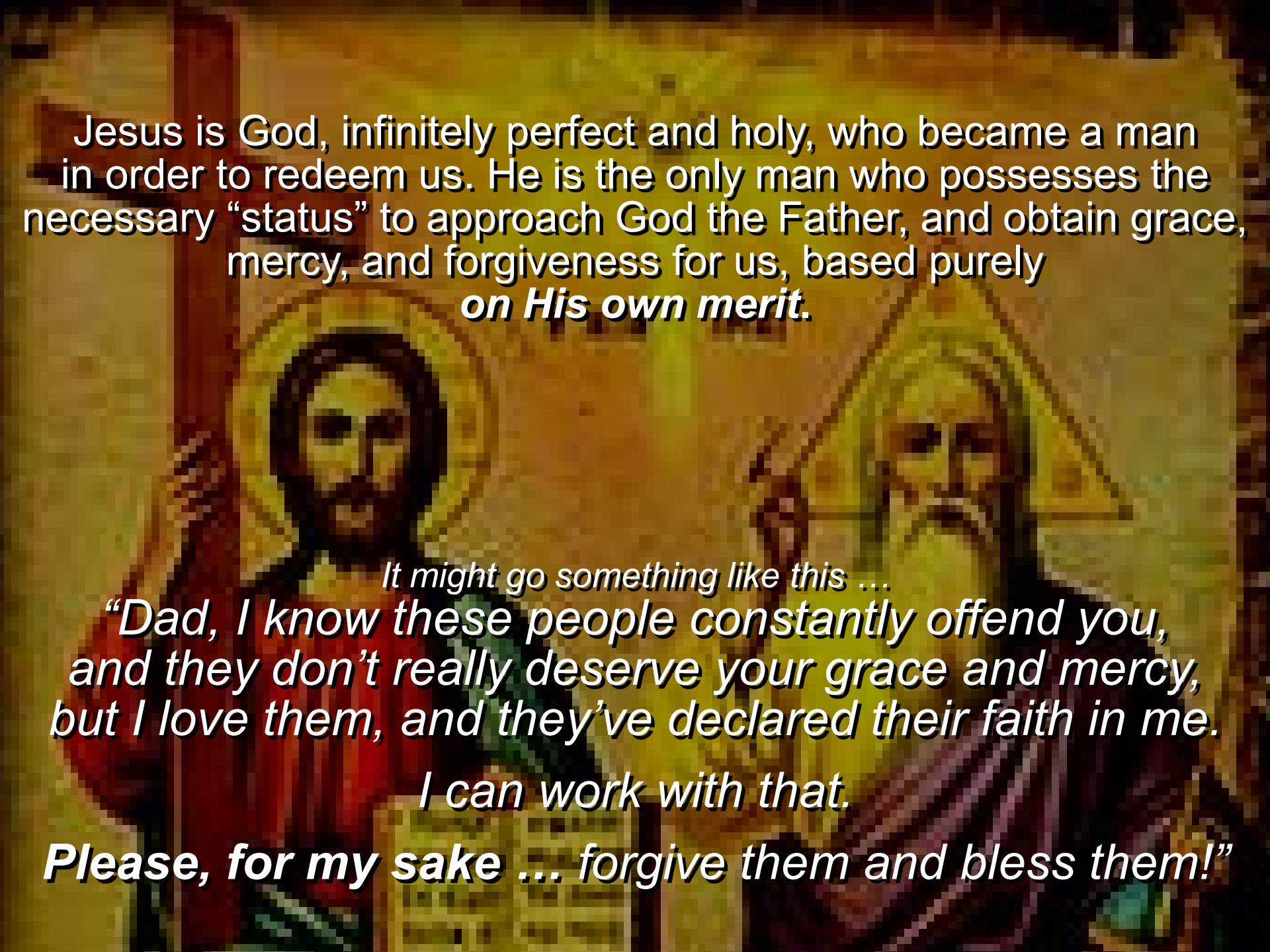
That's why God singled them out for praise, when He spoke to Jeremiah.

There was another very important reason, too.



God also held these men in such high regard because they pre-figured Jesus Christ, ***the divine and sinless man of infinite merit***

who would be capable of fully repairing the rift of sin between God and man, and restoring peace to God's people on earth.



Jesus is God, infinitely perfect and holy, who became a man in order to redeem us. He is the only man who possesses the necessary “status” to approach God the Father, and obtain grace, mercy, and forgiveness for us, based purely ***on His own merit.***

It might go something like this ...

“Dad, I know these people constantly offend you, and they don’t really deserve your grace and mercy, but I love them, and they’ve declared their faith in me.

I can work with that.

Please, for my sake ... forgive them and bless them!”

Merit

When we deny ourselves, avoid sin, and do God's will

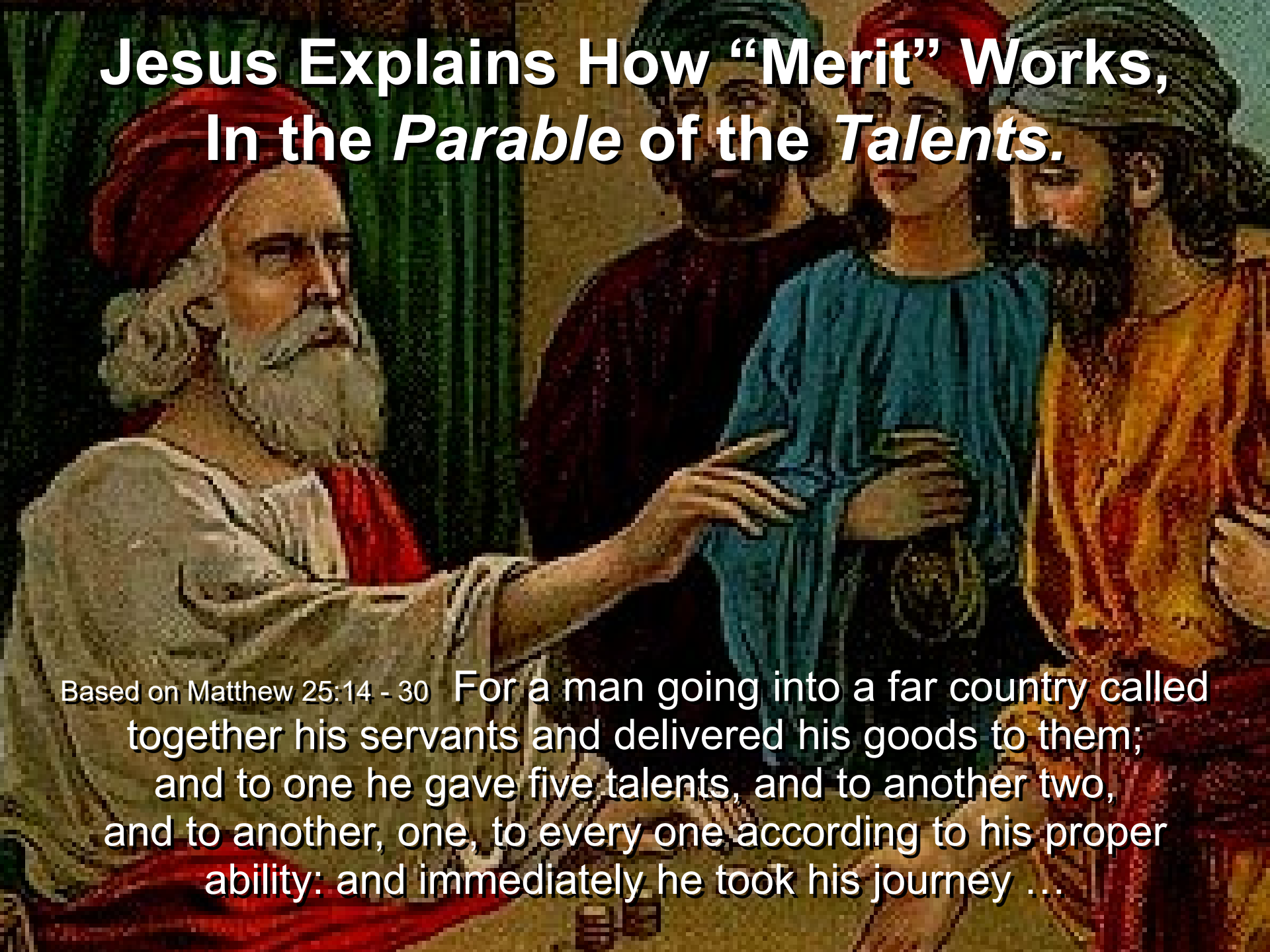
solely for

His honor and glory,
our personal merit

(God's own appraisal of us)

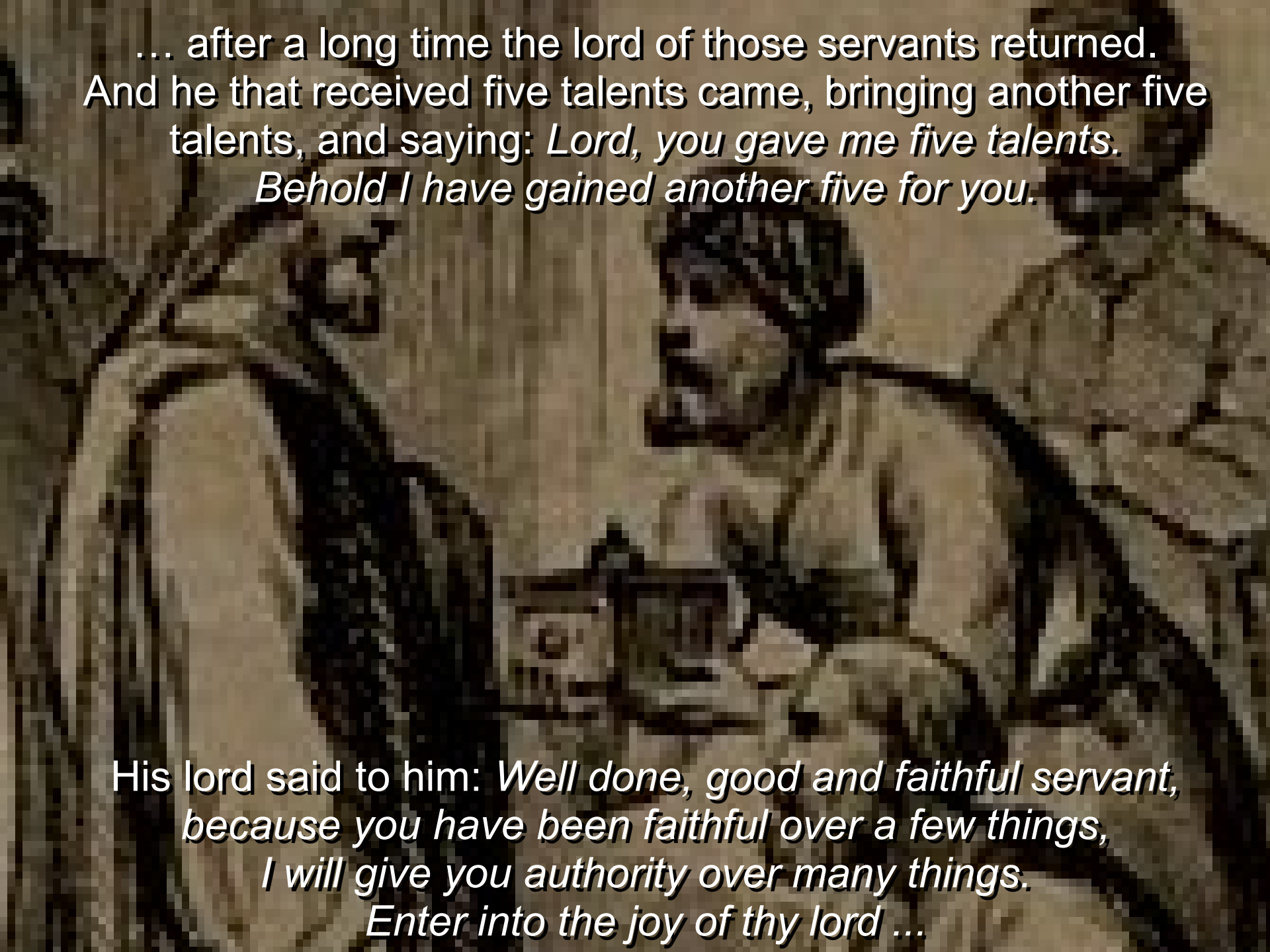
is likely to increase. The highest example of this is Jesus Christ, but for a person who is not divine, it's the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Mary led a totally sinless existence, while completely conforming her will to God's. Even though she did this in response to God's grace, her cooperation with that grace *merits* her exalted position in Heaven, seated at the right hand of her divine Son, as Queen of Heaven, and Mediatrix of Graces.



Jesus Explains How “Merit” Works, In the *Parable of the Talents*.


Based on Matthew 25:14 - 30 For a man going into a far country called together his servants and delivered his goods to them; and to one he gave five talents, and to another two, and to another, one, to every one according to his proper ability: and immediately he took his journey ...



... after a long time the lord of those servants returned.
And he that received five talents came, bringing another five
talents, and saying: *Lord, you gave me five talents.
Behold I have gained another five for you.*

His lord said to him: *Well done, good and faithful servant,
because you have been faithful over a few things,
I will give you authority over many things.
Enter into the joy of thy lord ...*

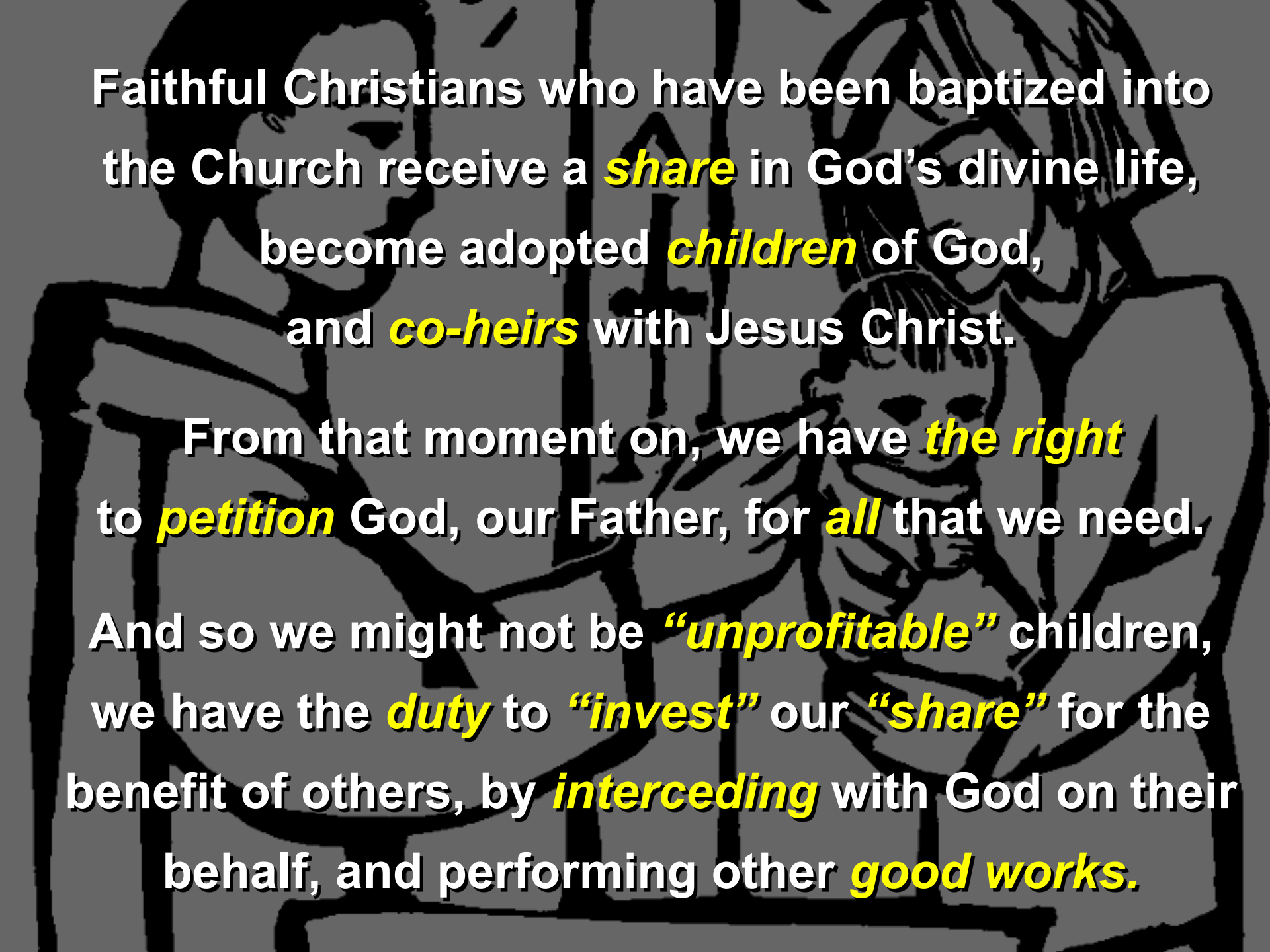
... he that had received the one talent came ... and made up an excuse: master ... *I was afraid, so I buried your talent in the earth. Here is the talent you gave to me.*



And his lord answering, said to him: *Wicked and slothful servant ... you should have at least committed my money to the bankers: so and at my coming I should have received my money back with interest.* So the lord took the talent away from him and gave it to the servant who had ten.

For to every one that does his lord's will,
more shall be given. As for the lazy and selfish,
even that which he wishes to keep shall be taken away.

*And the unprofitable servant was cast out into the exterior
darkness, where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth.*



Faithful Christians who have been baptized into the Church receive a **share** in God's divine life, become adopted **children** of God, and **co-heirs** with Jesus Christ.

From that moment on, we have **the right** to **petition** God, our Father, for **all** that we need.

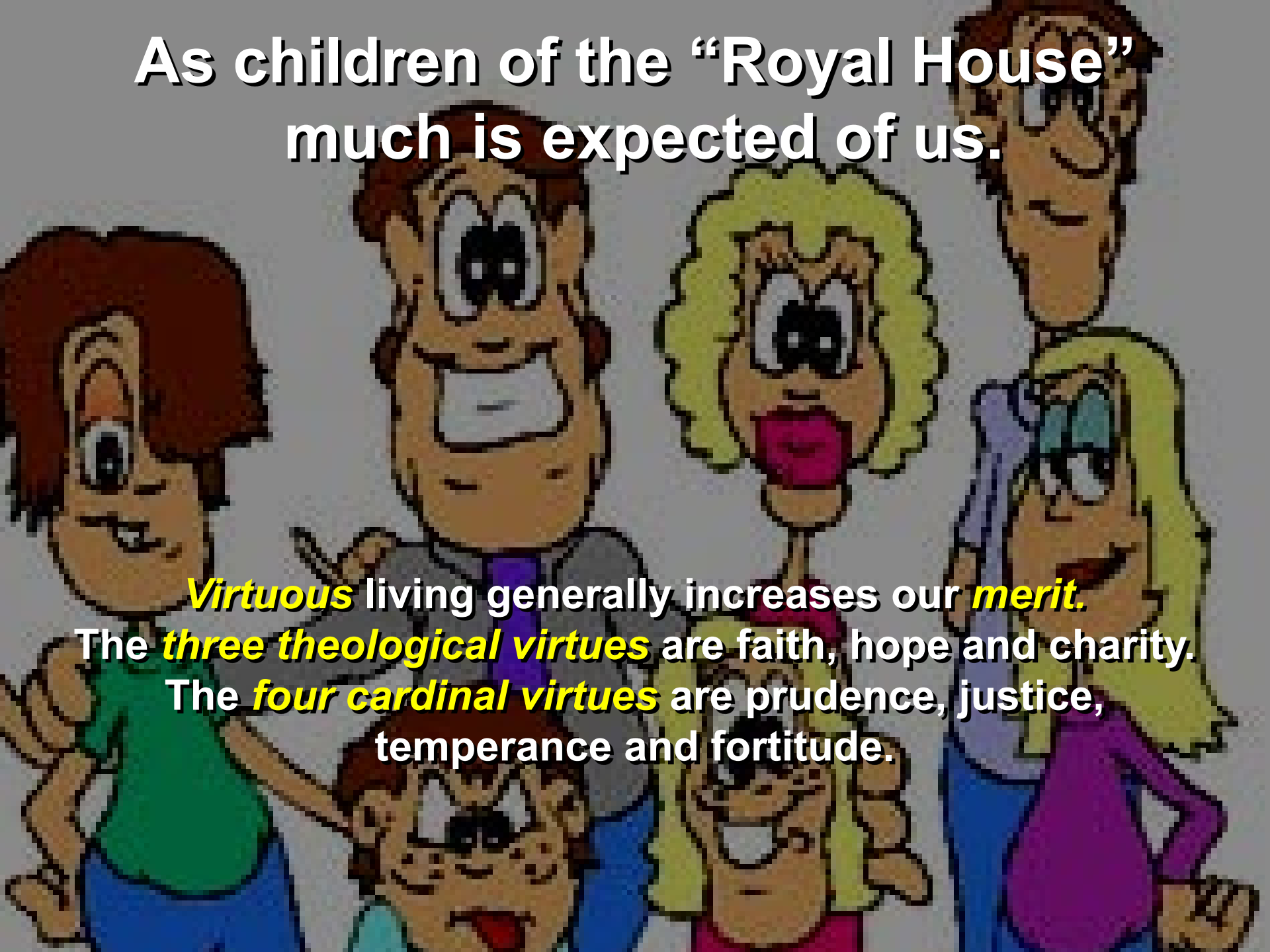
And so we might not be "**unprofitable**" children, we have the **duty** to "**invest**" our "**share**" for the benefit of others, by **interceding** with God on their behalf, and performing other **good works**.

As children of the “Royal House”
much is expected of us.

Virtuous living generally increases our ***merit***.

The ***three theological virtues*** are faith, hope and charity.

The ***four cardinal virtues*** are prudence, justice,
temperance and fortitude.



Definitions (Merriam-Webster's on-line)

Main Entry **INTERCESSION**:

Pronunciation: "in-t&r-'se-sh&n

Function: *noun*

1 : the act of interceding

**2 : prayer, petition,
or entreaty in favor of another**

- in·ter·ces·sion·al /-'sesh-n&l, -'se-sh&-n&l/ *adjective*

- in·ter·ces·sor /-'se-s&r/ *noun*

- in·ter·ces·so·ry /-'ses-rE, -'se-s&-rE/ *adjective*

All Of Us Are Called To Be Meritorious and Christ-Like

To respond positively to grace and “keep the faith”.

To live virtuously, avoid sin, and be holy.

To freely give of ourselves, in sacrifice to God.

To intercede for others with Him:

By pleading with God for mercy.

**By calling down His blessings
upon an often blind and generally sinful world.**

To acknowledge and worship our sovereign God
and fulfill our proper role in His eternal Kingdom.



Many of our intercessory activities may be critical to the temporal and spiritual welfare of those we love:

Fathers praying for wife, sons and daughters.

Mothers praying for husband, sons, and daughters.

Sons and daughters praying for parents and for each other.

Praying for friends, relatives, and community, as well as the deceased, who may be in Purgatory.

Praying for an end to abortion, an increase in vocations, a revival in the church, wisdom, zeal, and honesty in church and government officials.

All these, as well as other, various good works.

The Proper Attitude or “Disposition” Is Also Critical

We might not “see the harm”

in doing things that God,
through His Scripture,
His Commandments,
and/or through His Church,
tells us ***are sinful,***

but ...

***committing any type of sin
reduces our “standing” before God
in ways that we can’t even imagine.***

The Ten Commandments

1. I am the LORD your God: you shall not have strange Gods before me.
2. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
3. Remember to keep holy the LORD'S Day.
4. Honor your father and your mother.
5. You shall not kill.
6. You shall not commit adultery.
7. You shall not steal.
8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.

**The seven *deadly* sins are:
*pride, envy, gluttony,
lust, anger, greed and sloth.***

The Precepts of the Catholic Church

You shall attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation.

You shall confess your sins at least once a year.

You shall receive the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, at least, during the Easter season.

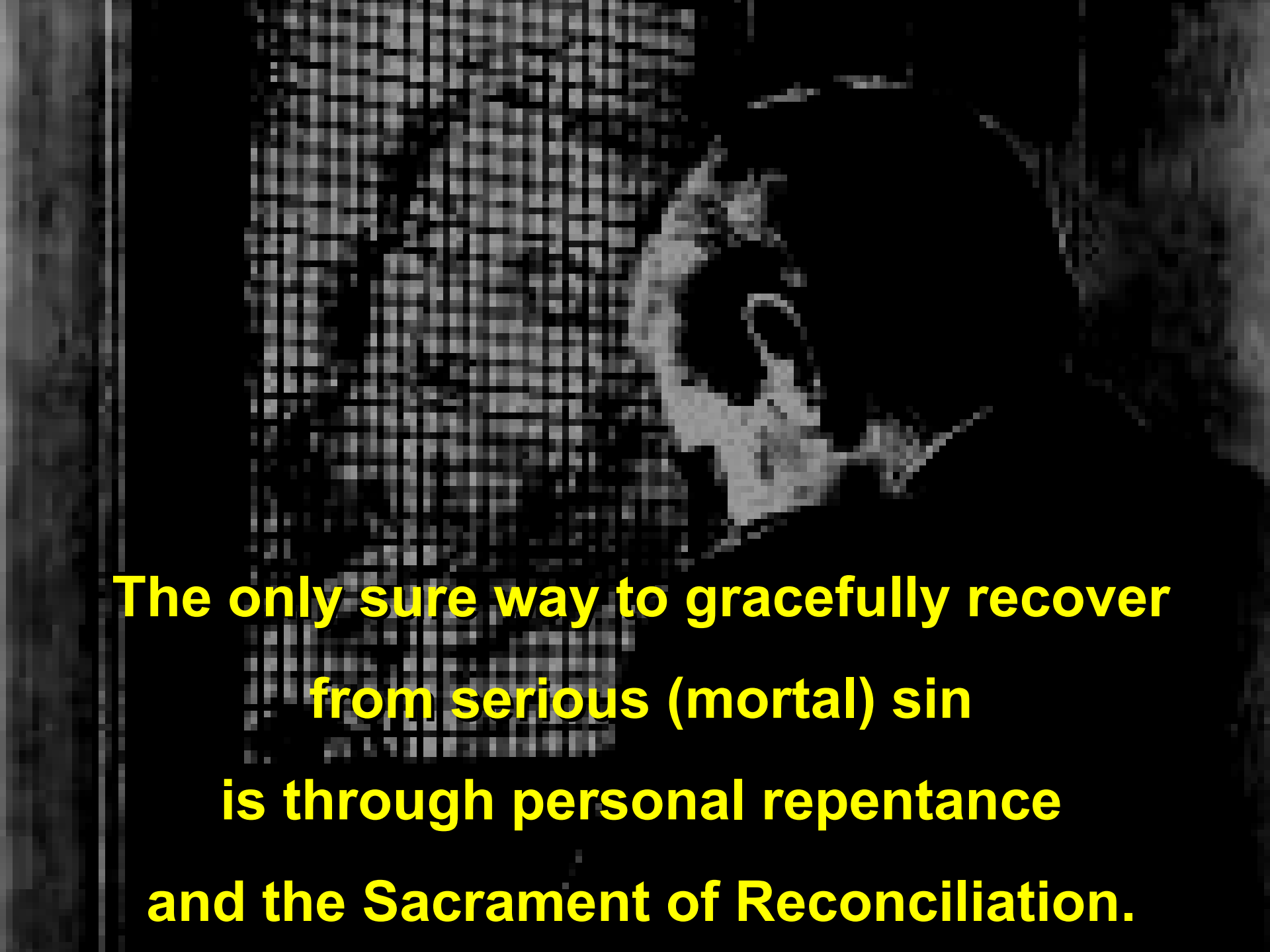
You shall observe the prescribed days of fasting and abstinence.

You shall help provide for the needs of the Church.



Jerusalem Destroyed

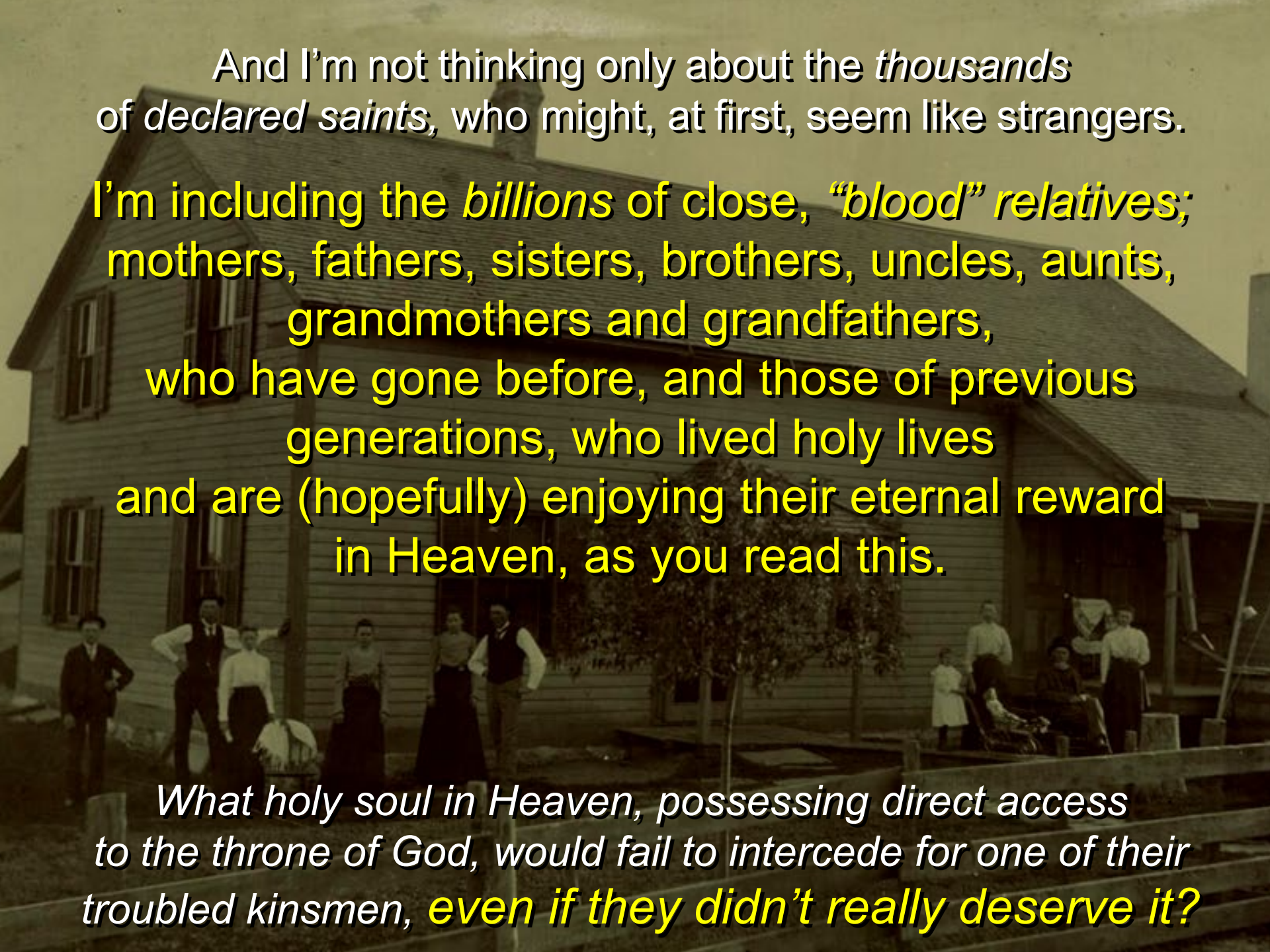
***Sin* diminishes or destroys our meritorious “*standing*” before God, which may affect our personal relationship with Him, as well as the effectiveness of our intercessory efforts on behalf of others.**



**The only sure way to gracefully recover
from serious (mortal) sin
is through personal repentance
and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.**

Fortunately, because God set it up this way, we're never abandoned or left alone, no matter how bad our behavior.

Beside our immediate family and our church community, we have recourse to the *intercessory* assistance of all those who have gone before us; the Blessed Virgin Mary, all the other saints in Heaven, plus all the angels, as well.



And I'm not thinking only about the *thousands* of *declared saints*, who might, at first, seem like strangers.

I'm including the *billions* of close, "*blood*" *relatives*; mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts, grandmothers and grandfathers, who have gone before, and those of previous generations, who lived holy lives and are (hopefully) enjoying their eternal reward in Heaven, as you read this.

What holy soul in Heaven, possessing direct access to the throne of God, would fail to intercede for one of their troubled kinsmen, *even if they didn't really deserve it?*

Until recent times, most people (*non-Catholics, too*) just naturally accepted and understood the reality of God's grace, and the awesome power of supernatural intercession.



Here's how it worked for Rocco "Rocky" Marciano ...

On his death bed, Pierino Marchegiano, an Italian (*and Catholic*) immigrant, called for his eldest son, 16 year-old Rocco, blessed him, and told him it would now be his responsibility to take care of the family.

Somebody Up There Likes Me

Lined up before dawn at New York's lower east-side docks, waiting for one of the few available jobs, Rocco was punched in the jaw by another fellow, who wanted to take his spot.

Unfazed by the blow, Rocco stood his ground, but his assailant suffered a broken hand, yelling,

“That kid’s chin felt like rock!”

From that day forward, young “Rocky” enjoyed a new nickname, as well as the respect of his fellow workers.

Somebody Up There Likes Me

Rocky eventually took a “side-job” as a “practice” boxing partner for Manhattan fighters in training. He did well, but if anything, he was too tough, and hit back too hard. Even the champions had problems sparring with him!

A big break came when he got a chance to fight the undefeated 3-time champion, Jersey Joe Walcott.

The odds against Rocky were posted at 30 to 1 ... almost nobody (except his parish priest) would bet on him. No wonder, since Jersey Joe was over half a foot taller than Rocky, and had a much longer reach. Joe also had substantially more training and experience in the ring.

Somebody Up There Likes Me

It was the 12th round and Rocky, caught by one of Jersey Joe's powerful left hooks, was down and very nearly, out. He didn't think he had the strength to get up again, either.

Now, Rocky thought he heard a familiar voice, "*If you get up now son, I promise you can win this.*"

He summoned all his strength and raised himself up, only to be greeted by another ferocious onslaught. But Rocky made it through that savage 12th round, and in the 13th he managed to overcome Jersey Joe's nearly impenetrable defenses, and successfully delivered a knock out blow.

"Rocky" Marciano was now the heavyweight boxing champion of the world!

During the post-fight interview, Marciano recounted how he thought he heard his mother's voice speak to him over the din of the crowd, and how he saw Jersey Joe Walcott carelessly let his guard down in that fateful 13th round.

Film footage of the bout showed that Jersey Joe never let down his defenses, and had fought a near flawless match.

Marciano's mom also denied calling out for him to get up. She said the only thing she was yelling was for Rocky to stay down, so he wouldn't get killed.

Later, when a bewildered reporter asked Rocky for an explanation of all these strange phenomena, Marciano held up the Catholic prayer book that he always kept in his corner, and said, simply,

"Somebody up there likes me."

Which brings us right back to the critical importance of personal merit:

In the first place, avoiding sin and living as God would have us live, gives honor and glory to God, who certainly deserves it.

In the second place, living a holy life and responding positively to God's grace increases our personal merit, making all of our actions, prayers, and petitions, whether for ourselves or others, more effective.

Finally, meritorious living on Earth prepares us for an eternity in Heaven, where all things virtuous are the "norm" and where we may have infinitely more important "work" ahead of us.

It's Good To Have "Friends" In High Places

The likely "order of merit" throughout Heaven, Purgatory, and the Earth

The Holy Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit

The Blessed Virgin Mary

The Angels and the the Saints in Heaven

The Faithful on Earth with no unforgiven sins

The Faithful on Earth with unconfessed or unrepented venial sins

The "un-churched" on Earth who respond positively to grace

Why do we speak of the merit of those in Purgatory as “potential”?

Souls experiencing Purgatory departed their earthly existence in an imperfect spiritual state that didn't warrant Hell, but wasn't yet suited for Heaven.

Those in Purgatory are guaranteed Heaven at some point, but until then, they are generally powerless to help themselves.

The faithful on Earth can help them, however, through *intercessory prayer* and by obtaining and donating *indulgences* on their behalf, which have the power to reduce their “stay” in Purgatory or even, immediately “conduct” them into Heaven.

**It would seem logical that a heavenly
soul released from Purgatory
due to the spiritual assistance
of one on Earth,
might be very pleased to
“return the favor”
by interceding with God, in Heaven,
for his or her earthly benefactor!**

Propitiation



Matthew 3:17 And behold a voice from heaven saying:
This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

Definitions (Merriam-Webster's on-line)

Main Entry **PROPITIATE**: pro·pi·ti·ate

Pronunciation: prO-'pi-shE-"At

Function: *transitive verb*

: to gain or regain the favor or goodwill of :

APPEASE, CONCILIATE

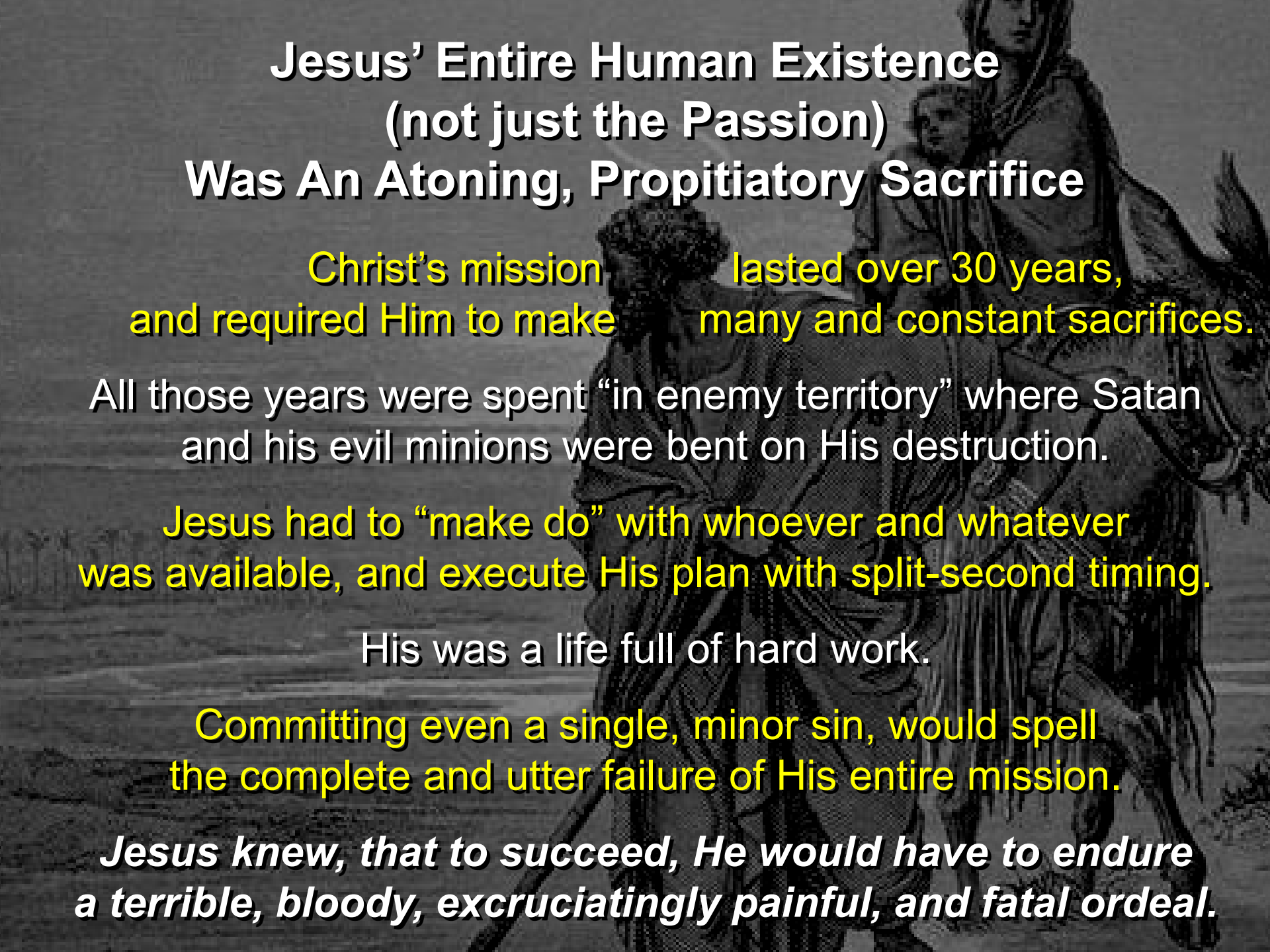
synonym see PACIFY

PROPITIATION: prO-"pi-shE-'A-sh&n

Function: *noun*

- 1 : the act of propitiating
- 2 : something that propitiates;

specifically : an atoning sacrifice



Jesus' Entire Human Existence (not just the Passion) Was An Atoning, Propitiatory Sacrifice

Christ's mission and required Him to make many and constant sacrifices. lasted over 30 years,

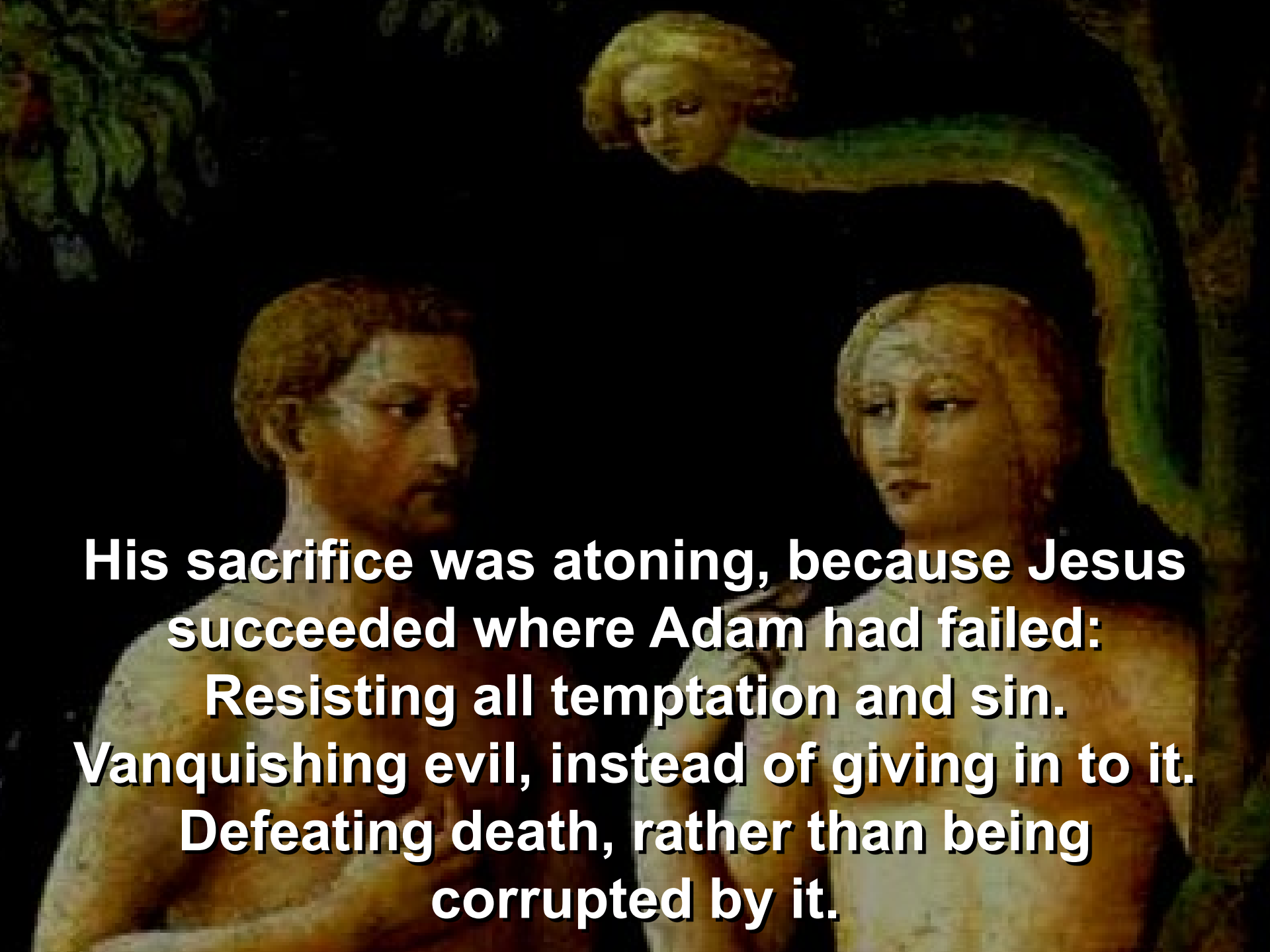
All those years were spent "in enemy territory" where Satan and his evil minions were bent on His destruction.

Jesus had to "make do" with whoever and whatever was available, and execute His plan with split-second timing.

His was a life full of hard work.

Committing even a single, minor sin, would spell the complete and utter failure of His entire mission.

Jesus knew, that to succeed, He would have to endure a terrible, bloody, excruciatingly painful, and fatal ordeal.

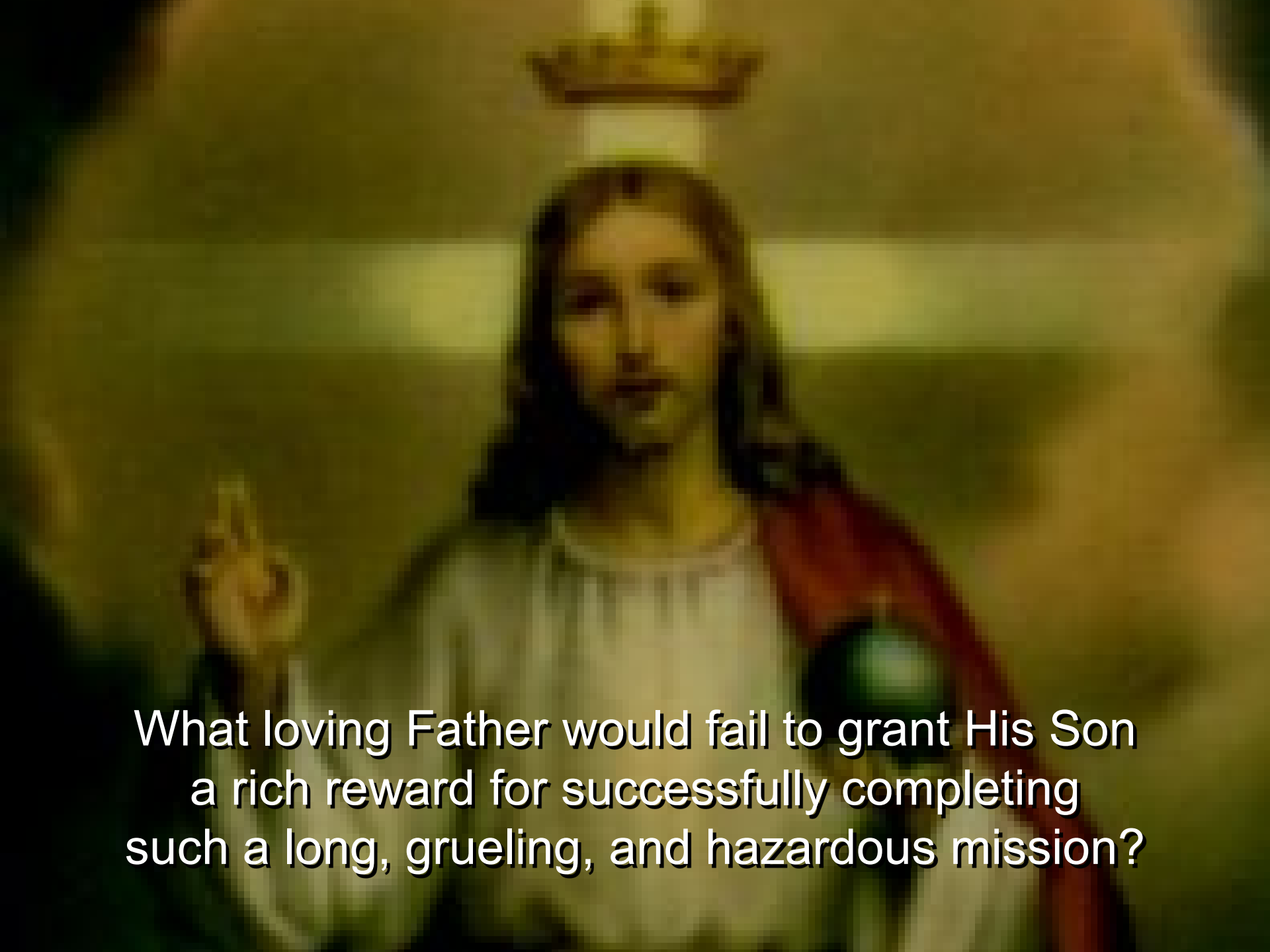
A detail from Michelangelo's famous fresco 'The Creation of Adam'. The image shows Adam on the left, reclining and looking towards the right. Eve is on the right, looking towards Adam. Above them, a green serpent is coiled around a cherub's head. The background is dark and textured.

**His sacrifice was atoning, because Jesus succeeded where Adam had failed:
Resisting all temptation and sin.
Vanquishing evil, instead of giving in to it.
Defeating death, rather than being corrupted by it.**

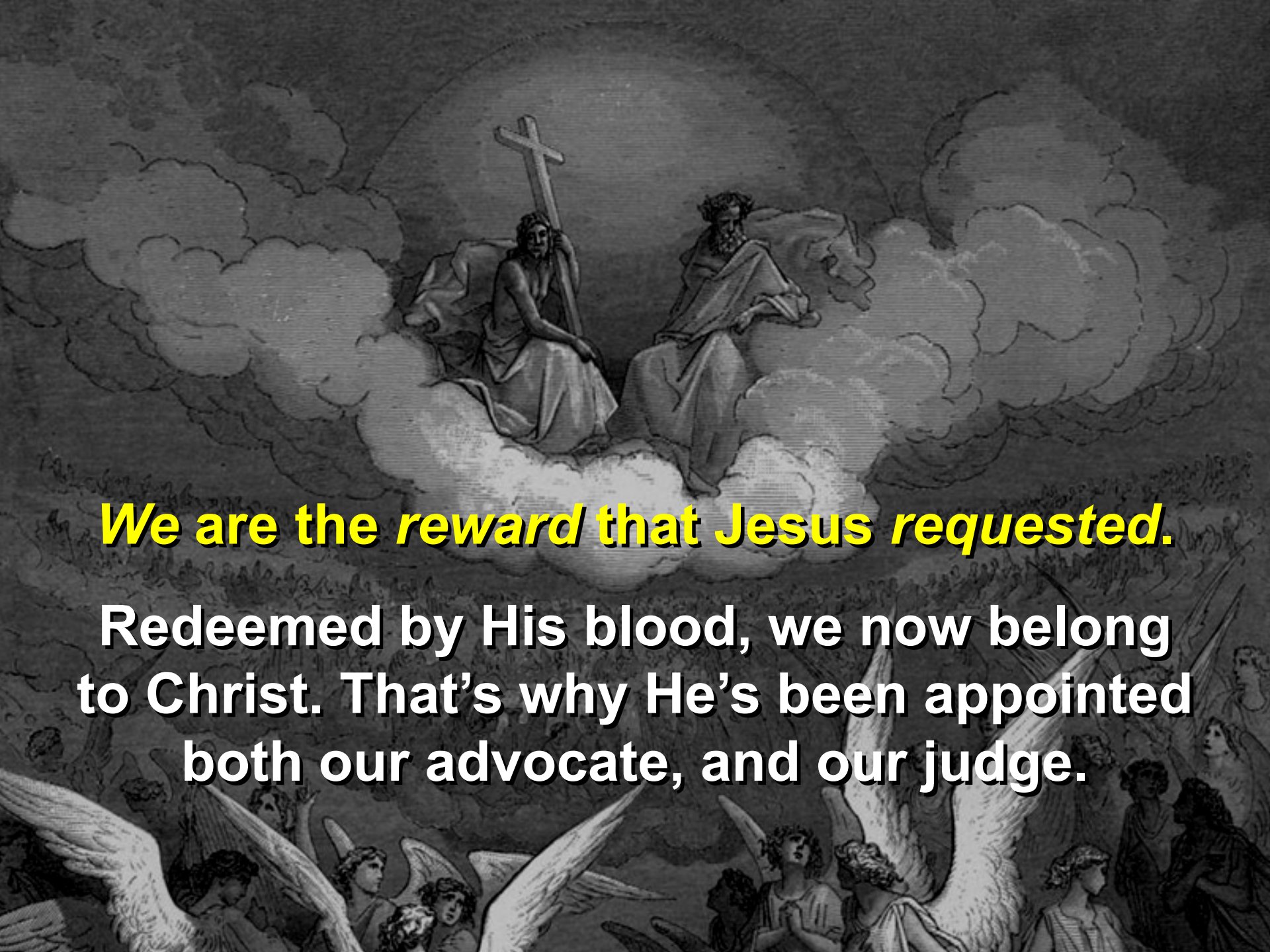
Christ's sacrifice was **propitiatory**, because only the **sinless** Son of God, **made man**, could turn the Father's justifiable wrath over man's sins to mercy, and turn His eternal condemnation of sinners, to grace and goodwill.

Why? How?

Because now, whenever God looks at mankind, instead of the sinful and fallen Adam, He sees His perfect, sinless, and triumphant Son, Jesus, standing there, at the head!



What loving Father would fail to grant His Son
a rich reward for successfully completing
such a long, grueling, and hazardous mission?



We are the reward that Jesus requested.

Redeemed by His blood, we now belong to Christ. That's why He's been appointed both our advocate, and our judge.

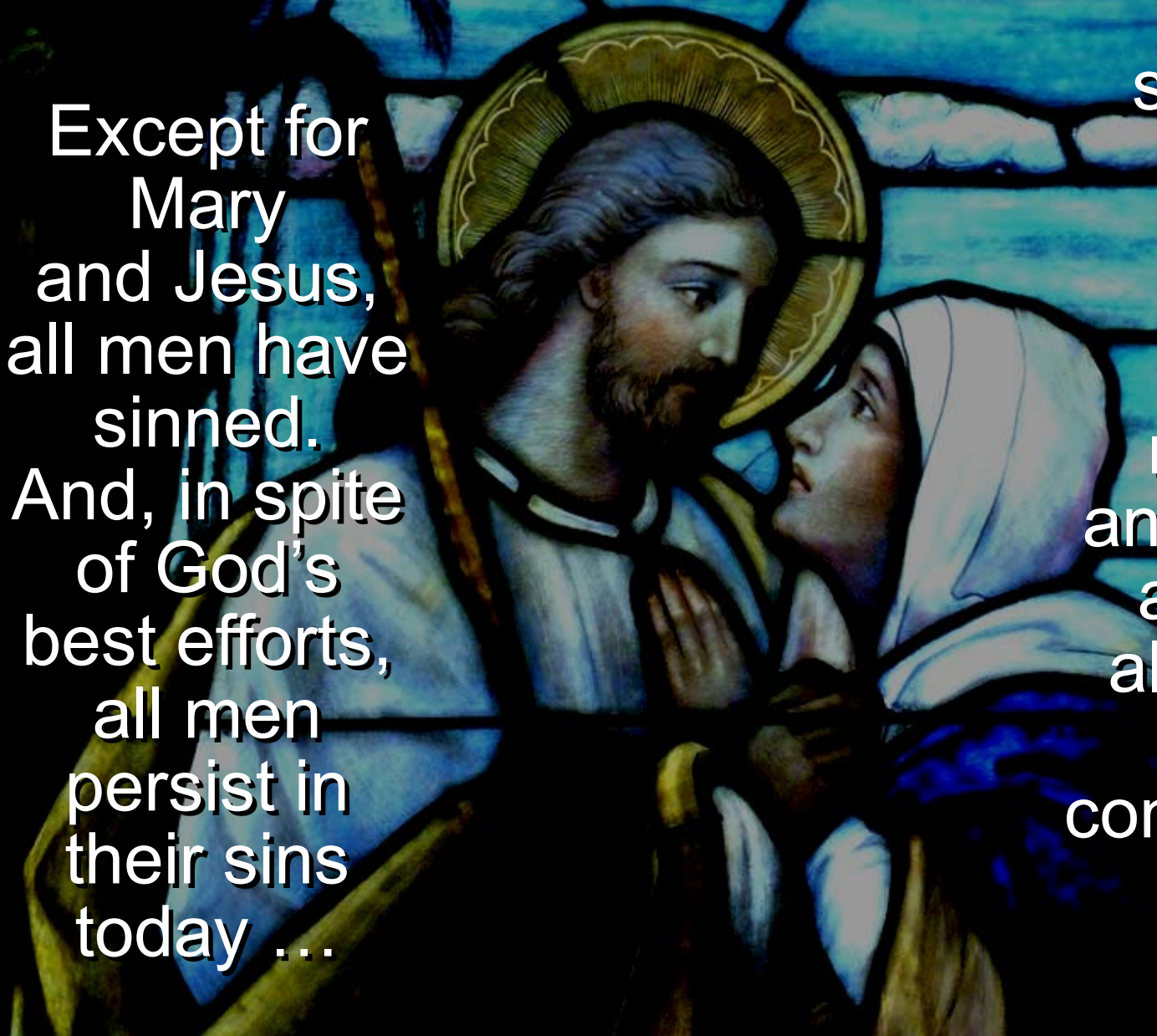


It's Much *Smarter* To Accept
And Cooperate With His Grace *Now*,
Than To Risk His Judgment, *Later*.

Universal *Sin* Brings Universal *Wrath*

Except for
Mary
and Jesus,
all men have
sinned.
And, in spite
of God's
best efforts,
all men
persist in
their sins
today ...

so all men
continue
to be
subject
to God's
righteous
anger (wrath)
as well as
all the other
eternal
consequences
of their
sins.



Redemption Through Faith In the Power of Christ's Propitiatory Sacrifice

**By taking on flesh,
becoming a sinless, obedient man,
and giving His life for us,
Jesus did everything that was necessary
to redeem mankind (atone)
and to satisfy (appease)
God's righteous anger for our *past* sins.**

See Romans 3:23 - 25

Divine Mercy

God the Father was so pleased with the redemptive work of His divine Son that He granted us mercy and unmerited favor in Jesus' "honor" and at His request.

**Luke 23:34 *And Jesus said:
Father, forgive them,
for they know not what they do.***

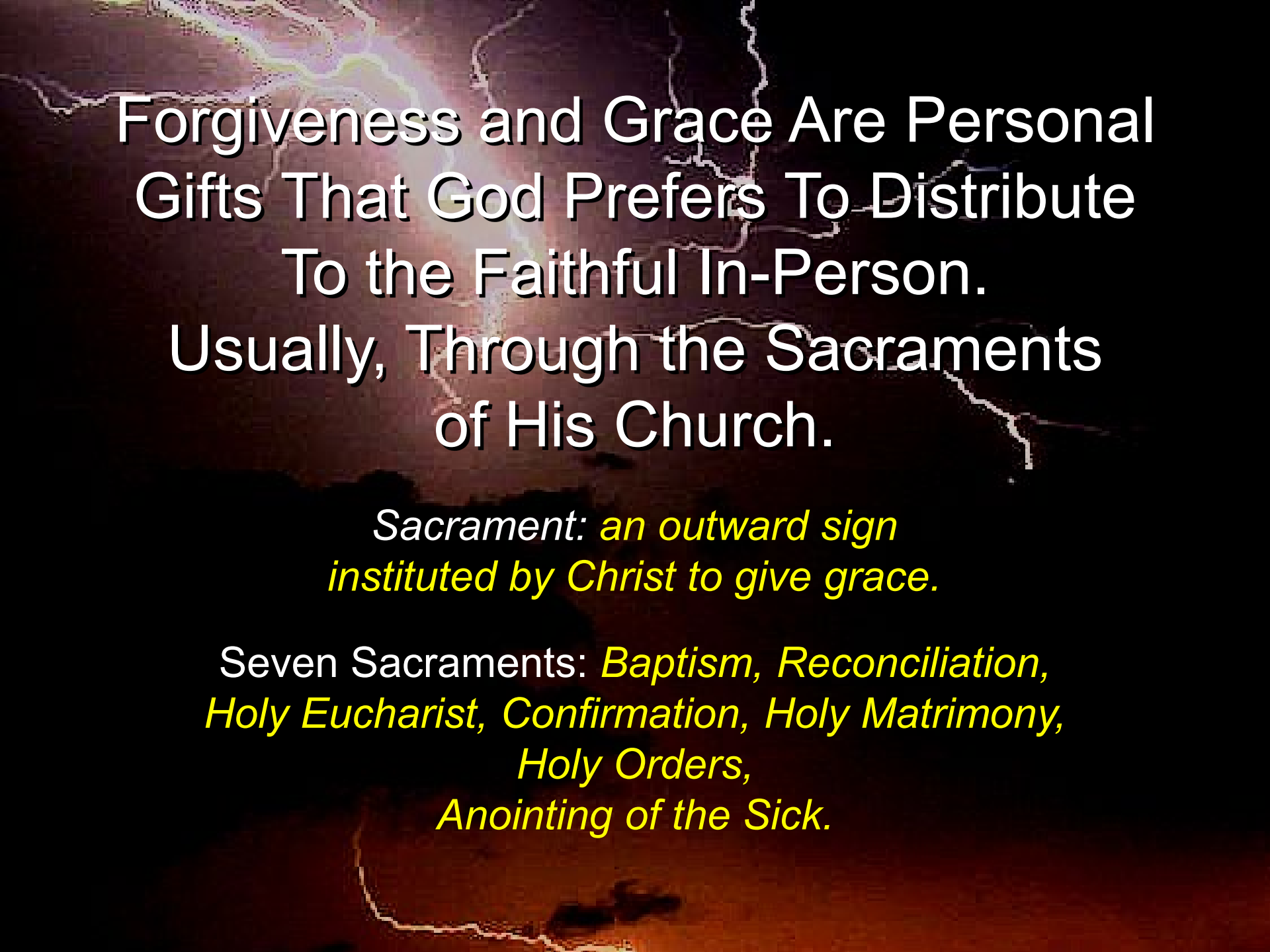
The Catholic (Universal) Church

Only when we faithfully
“line-up” behind Jesus



and petition
God the Father
through Him,
with Him,
in Him,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
through baptism, and a lifetime of full, faithful
participation in the work, worship, sacraments and
devotions of His Holy Church, can we be reasonably
certain (hope) to receive the necessary measure
of God's grace and mercy.



Forgiveness and Grace Are Personal
Gifts That God Prefers To Distribute
To the Faithful In-Person.
Usually, Through the Sacraments
of His Church.

*Sacrament: an outward sign
instituted by Christ to give grace.*

Seven Sacraments: *Baptism, Reconciliation,
Holy Eucharist, Confirmation, Holy Matrimony,
Holy Orders,
Anointing of the Sick.*



*Every time
we receive
a sacrament ...*

by the power
of the Holy Spirit,
and through
His church,
we personally
encounter Jesus,
our divine
advocate.

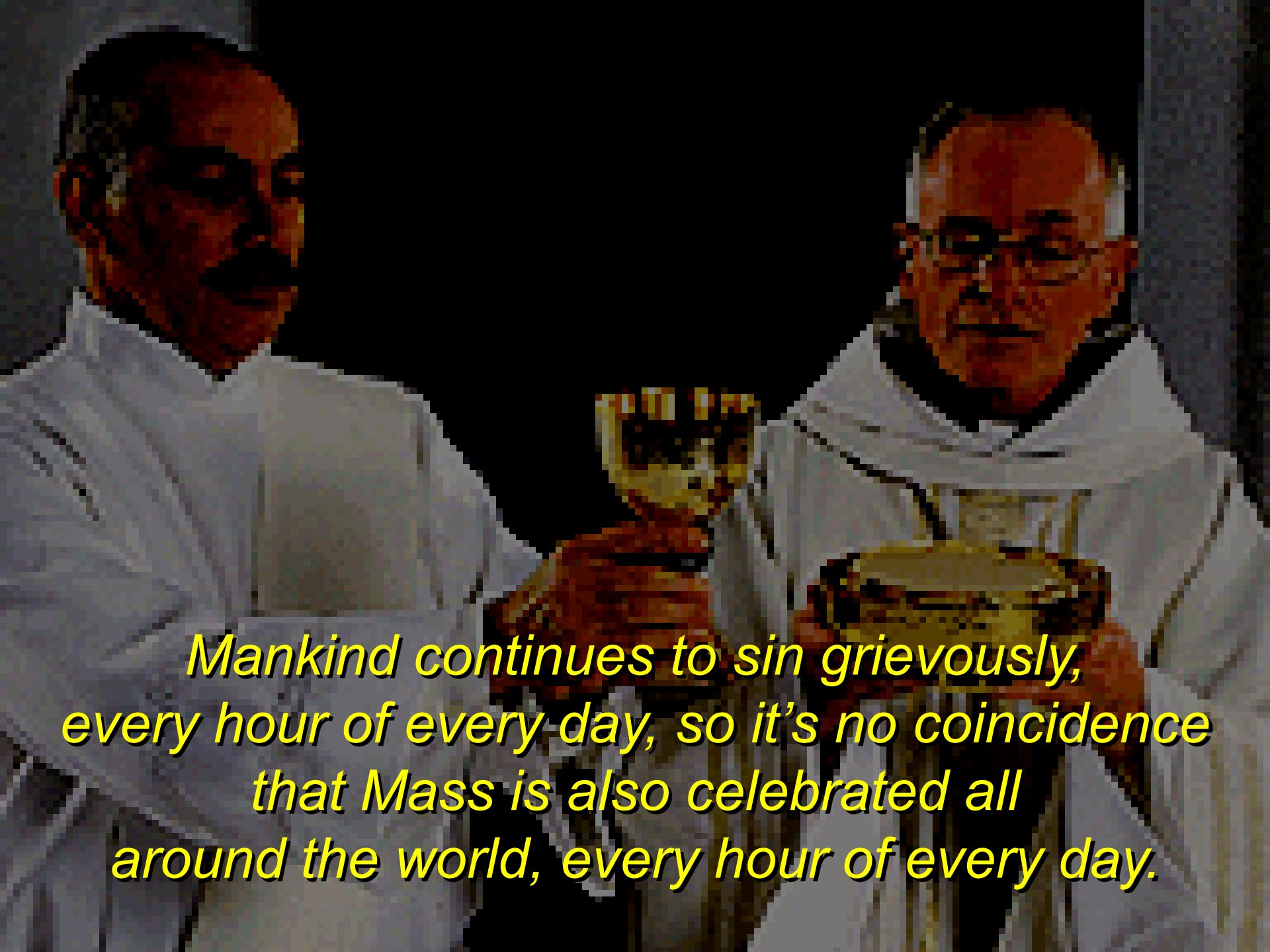


Every ***Sunday***,
the Lord's Day,
each of us
has a "***date***"
in God's
"court"
where we're
represented
by Jesus, our
holy, spotless,
High Priest
and ***advocate***.

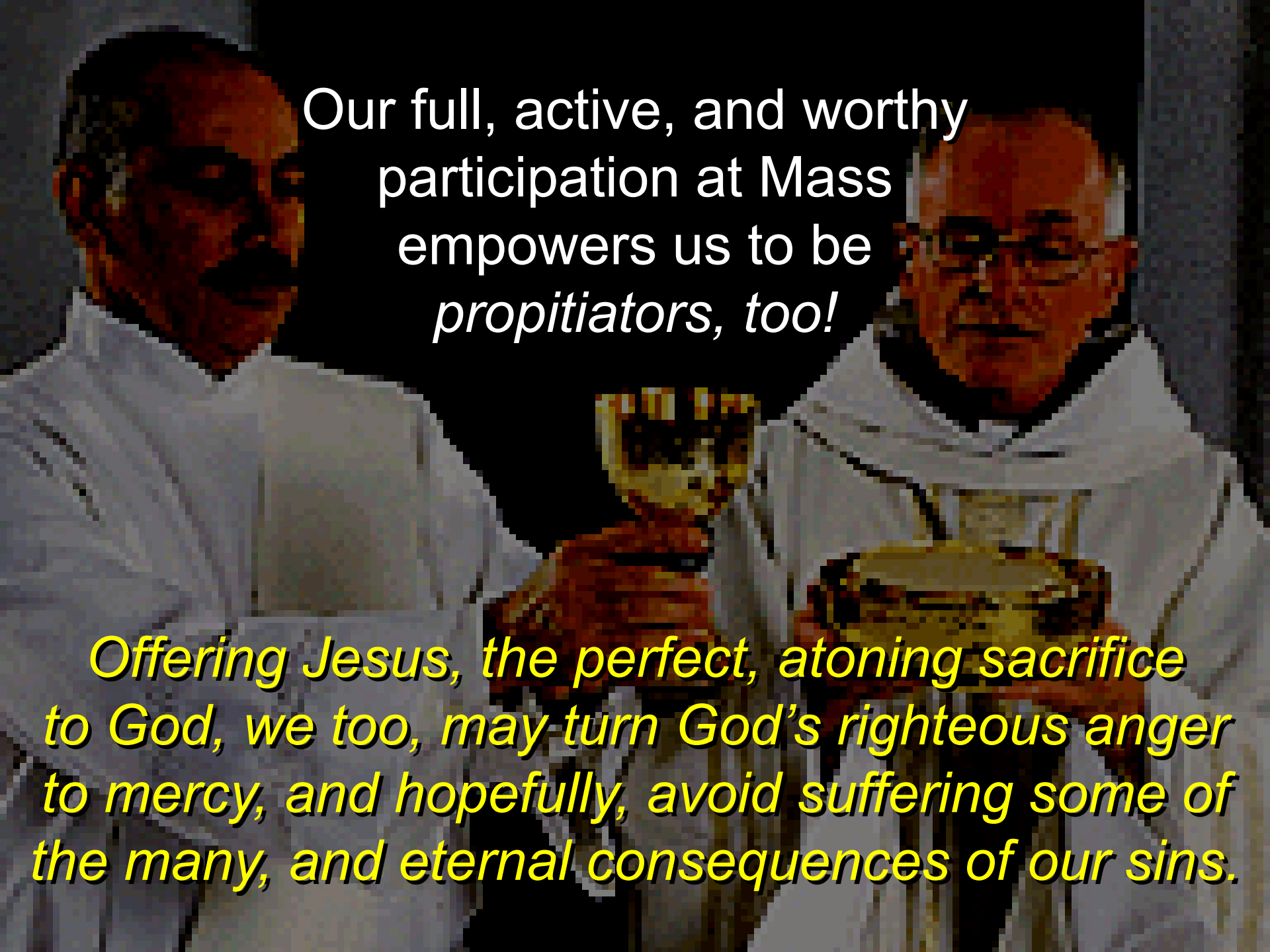
When we fail
to attend
Sunday Mass,
we not only
disrespect the
work of Christ
and his church,
we risk
eternal
judgment,
by default.



The Mass Is Both A Propitiatory Sacrifice
And A Close Encounter With Christ,
Our Advocate.

A photograph of two priests in white vestments performing a Mass. The priest on the left is holding a golden chalice, and the priest on the right is holding a golden paten. The background is dark, and the lighting is focused on the priests and their vessels.

*Mankind continues to sin grievously,
every hour of every day, so it's no coincidence
that Mass is also celebrated all
around the world, every hour of every day.*

A photograph of two priests in white vestments, one holding a chalice and the other a paten, with a central text overlay.

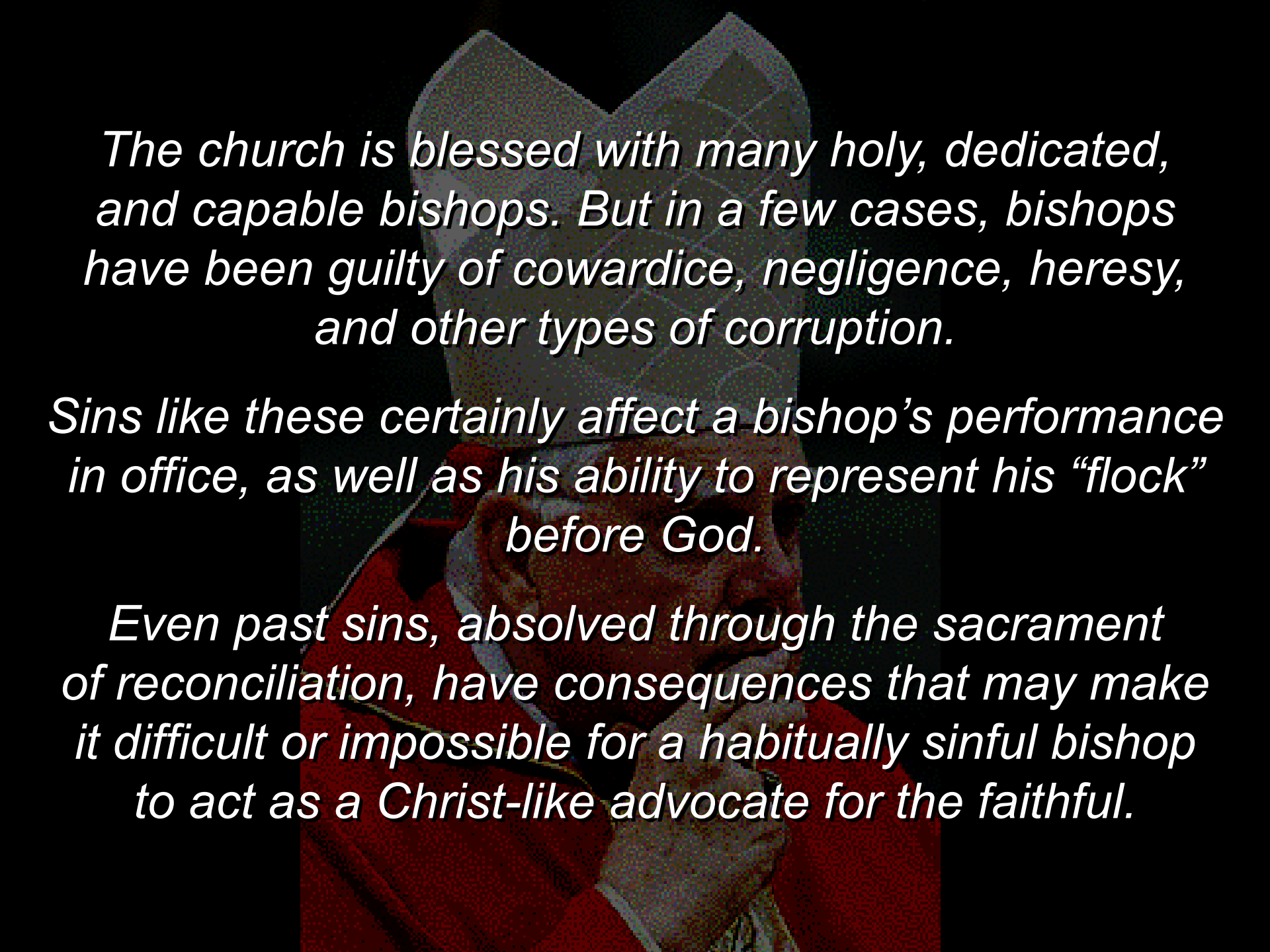
Our full, active, and worthy
participation at Mass
empowers us to be
propitiators, too!

*Offering Jesus, the perfect, atoning sacrifice
to God, we too, may turn God's righteous anger
to mercy, and hopefully, avoid suffering some of
the many, and eternal consequences of our sins.*

**Jesus could not have accomplished
His redemptive mission if He had
ever committed *any type* of sin.**



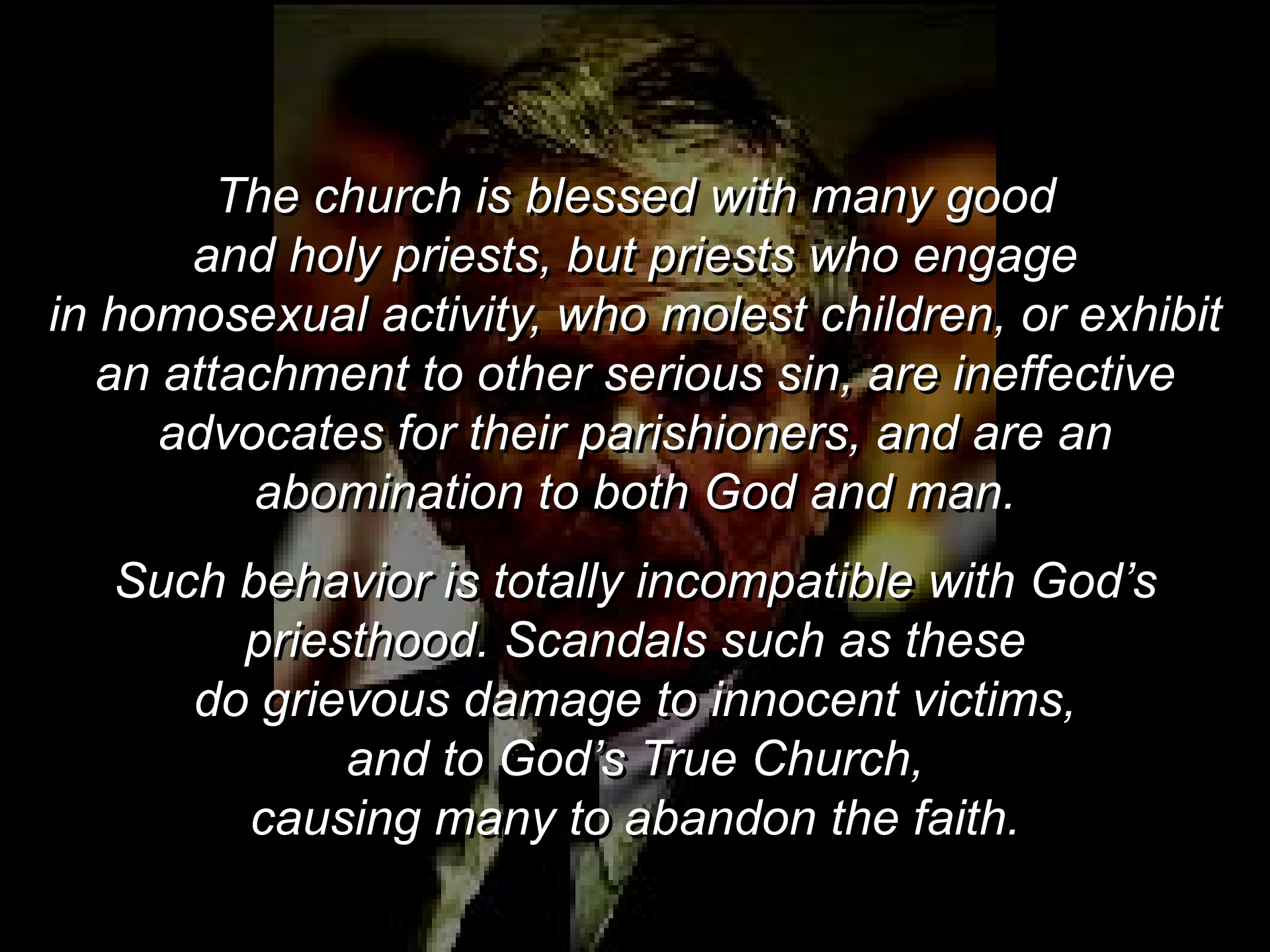
***Sin can prevent us from accomplishing
our mission, as well.***

A bishop in red vestments is shown reading a book. The image is semi-transparent and serves as a background for the text. The bishop is wearing a mitre and is looking down at the book he is holding. The text is overlaid on this image.

The church is blessed with many holy, dedicated, and capable bishops. But in a few cases, bishops have been guilty of cowardice, negligence, heresy, and other types of corruption.

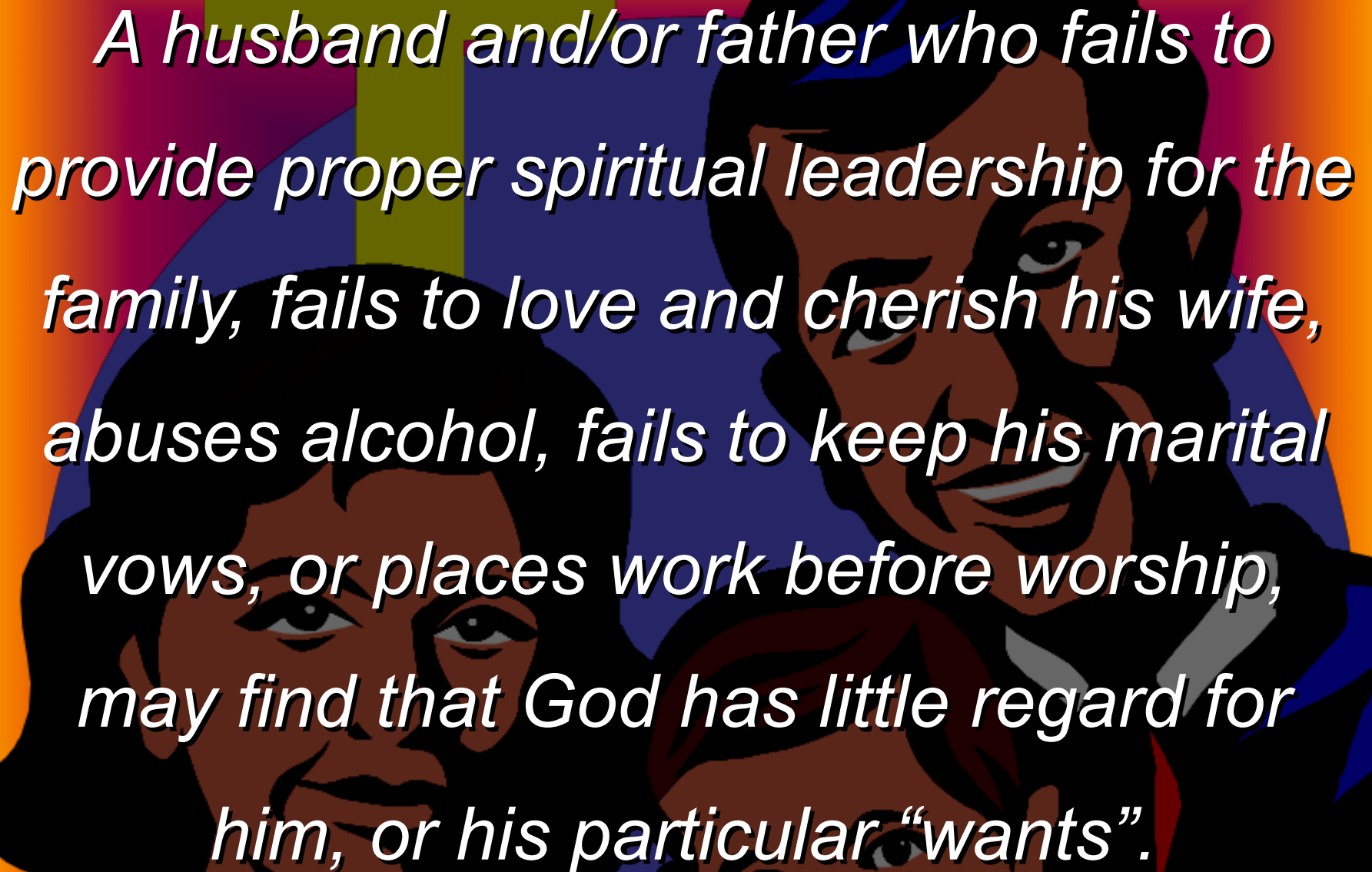
Sins like these certainly affect a bishop's performance in office, as well as his ability to represent his "flock" before God.

Even past sins, absolved through the sacrament of reconciliation, have consequences that may make it difficult or impossible for a habitually sinful bishop to act as a Christ-like advocate for the faithful.

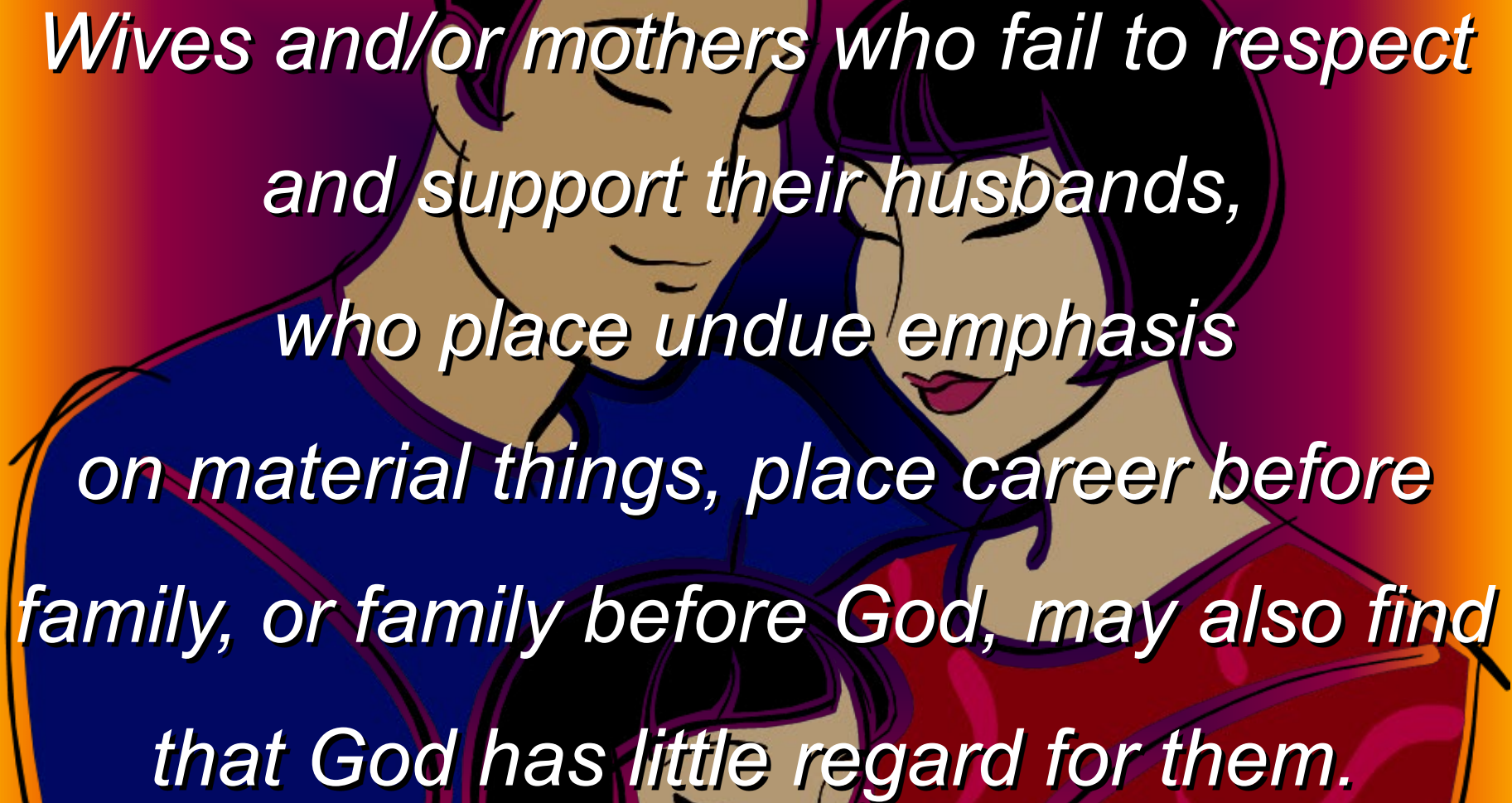


The church is blessed with many good and holy priests, but priests who engage in homosexual activity, who molest children, or exhibit an attachment to other serious sin, are ineffective advocates for their parishioners, and are an abomination to both God and man.

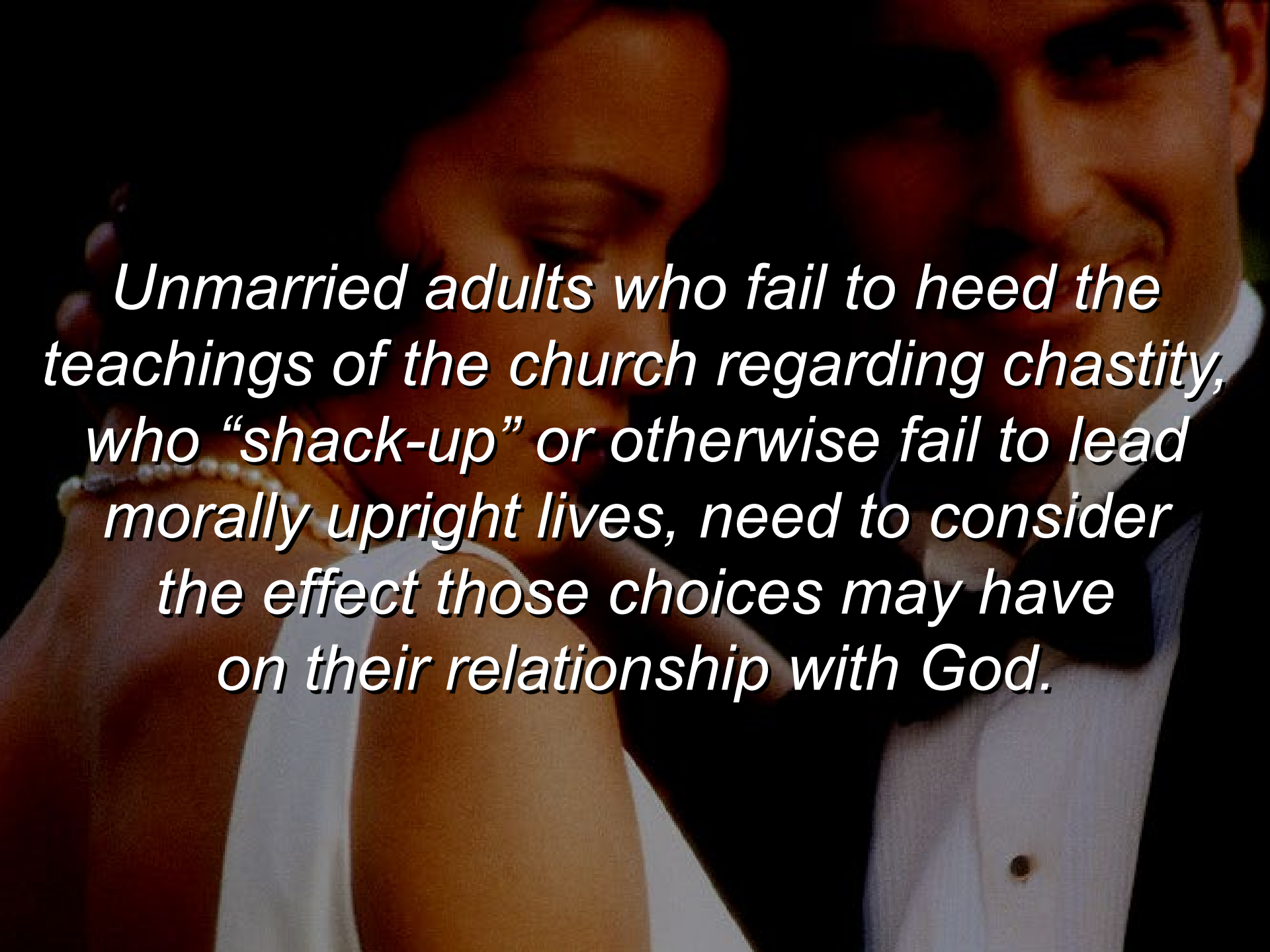
Such behavior is totally incompatible with God's priesthood. Scandals such as these do grievous damage to innocent victims, and to God's True Church, causing many to abandon the faith.



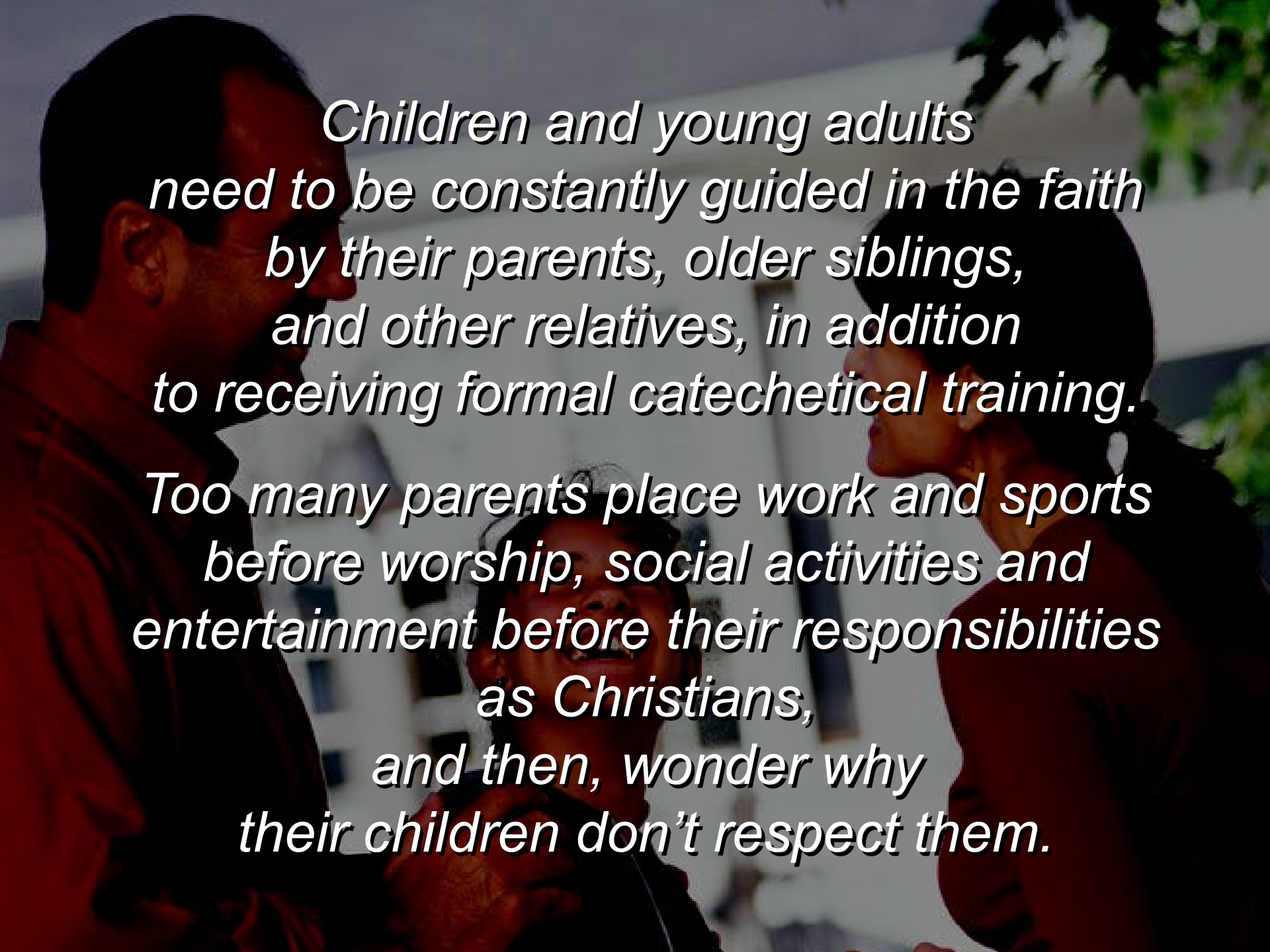
A husband and/or father who fails to provide proper spiritual leadership for the family, fails to love and cherish his wife, abuses alcohol, fails to keep his marital vows, or places work before worship, may find that God has little regard for him, or his particular “wants”.



Wives and/or mothers who fail to respect and support their husbands, who place undue emphasis on material things, place career before family, or family before God, may also find that God has little regard for them.

A close-up photograph of a man in a white tuxedo jacket and black bow tie, smiling and holding the hand of a woman. The woman is wearing a white dress and a pearl bracelet. The background is dark and out of focus.

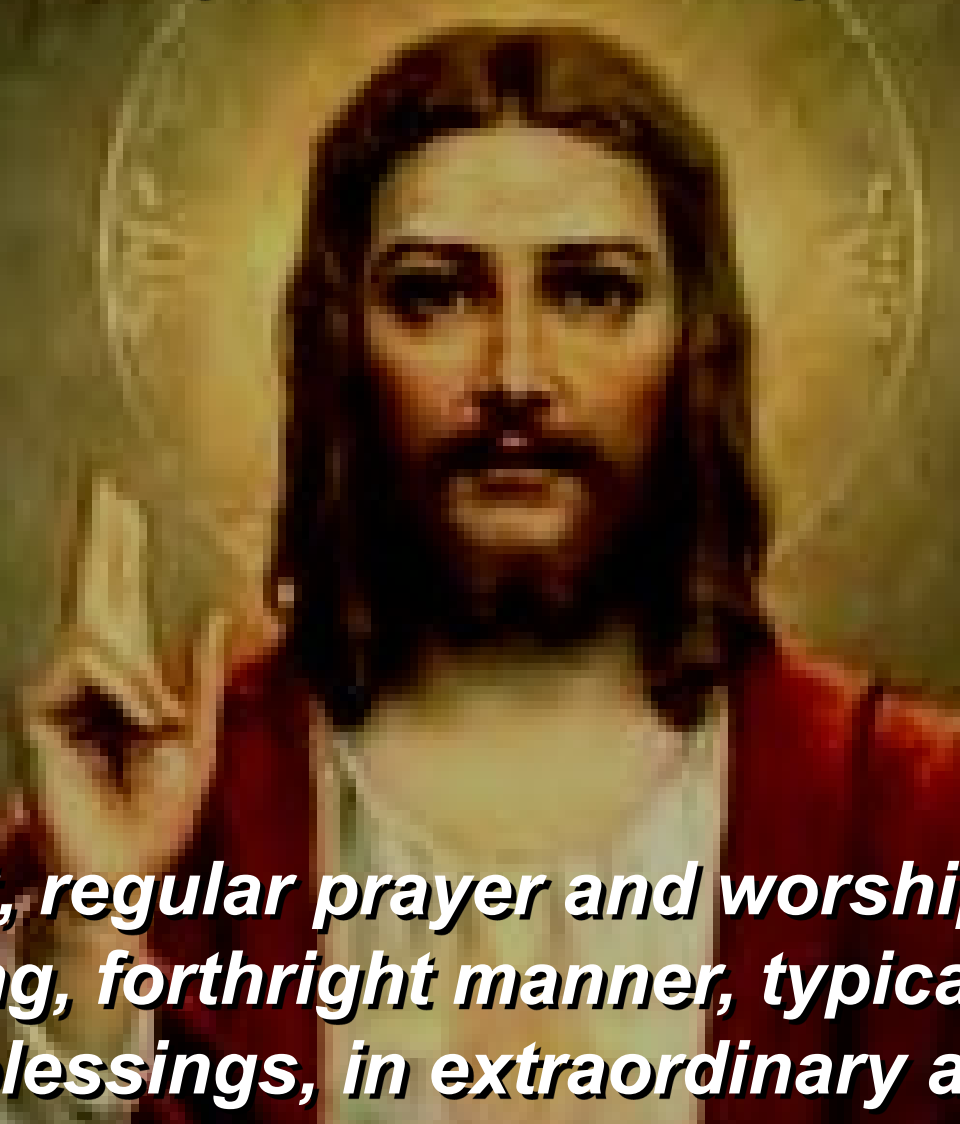
Unmarried adults who fail to heed the teachings of the church regarding chastity, who “shack-up” or otherwise fail to lead morally upright lives, need to consider the effect those choices may have on their relationship with God.

A photograph of a family of four smiling together outdoors. The father is on the left, the mother is on the right, and two children are in the center. The image is slightly faded to allow text to be overlaid.

*Children and young adults
need to be constantly guided in the faith
by their parents, older siblings,
and other relatives, in addition
to receiving formal catechetical training.*

*Too many parents place work and sports
before worship, social activities and
entertainment before their responsibilities
as Christians,
and then, wonder why
their children don't respect them.*

Because God has a high regard for personal holiness, enduring faith, and loving, self-sacrifice ...



a clean heart, regular prayer and worship, hard work, and a loving, forthright manner, typically obtains all God's blessings, in extraordinary abundance.

Positive cooperation with God's Grace

brings everlasting joy and fulfillment

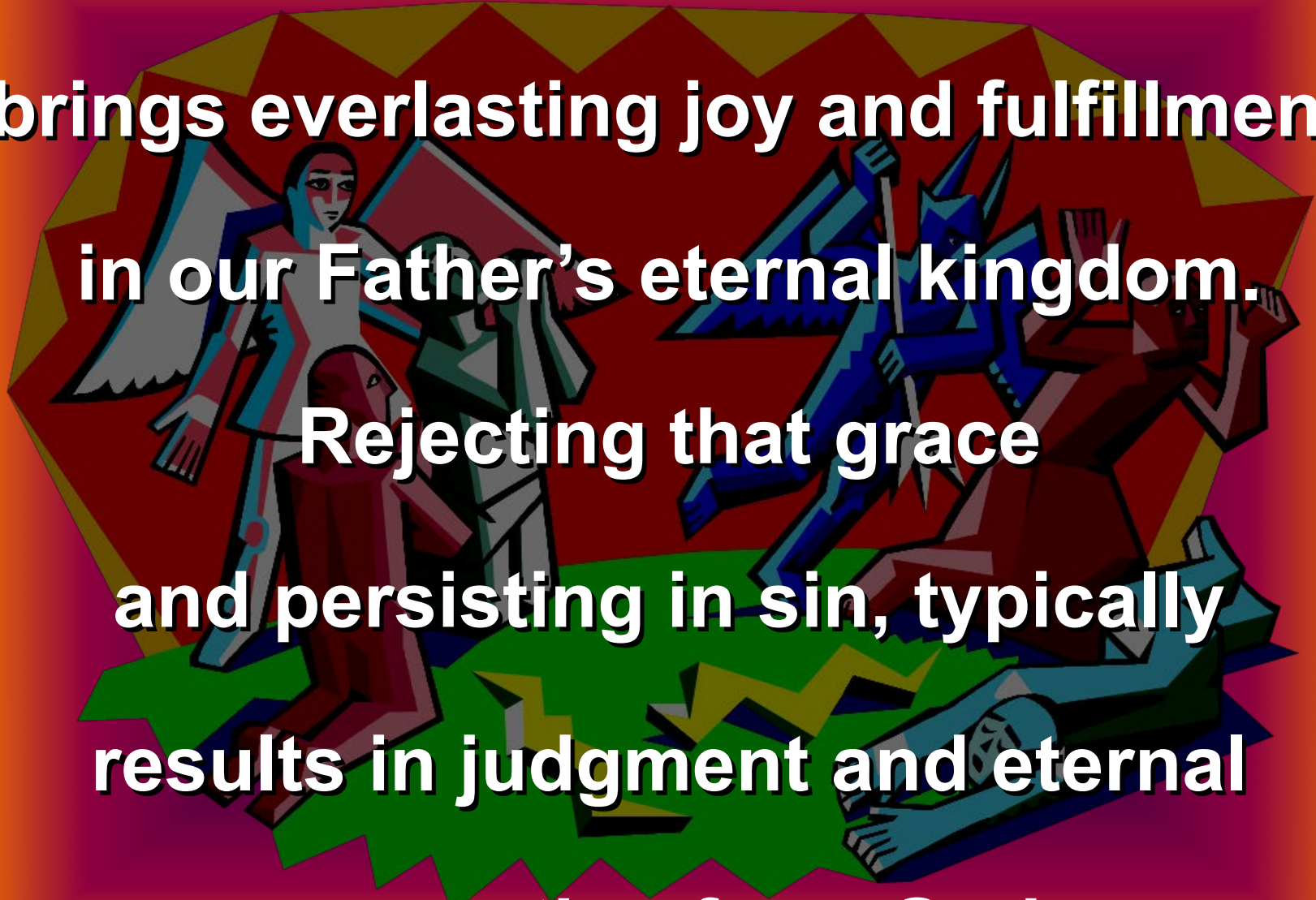
in our Father's eternal kingdom.

Rejecting that grace

and persisting in sin, typically

results in judgment and eternal

separation from God.

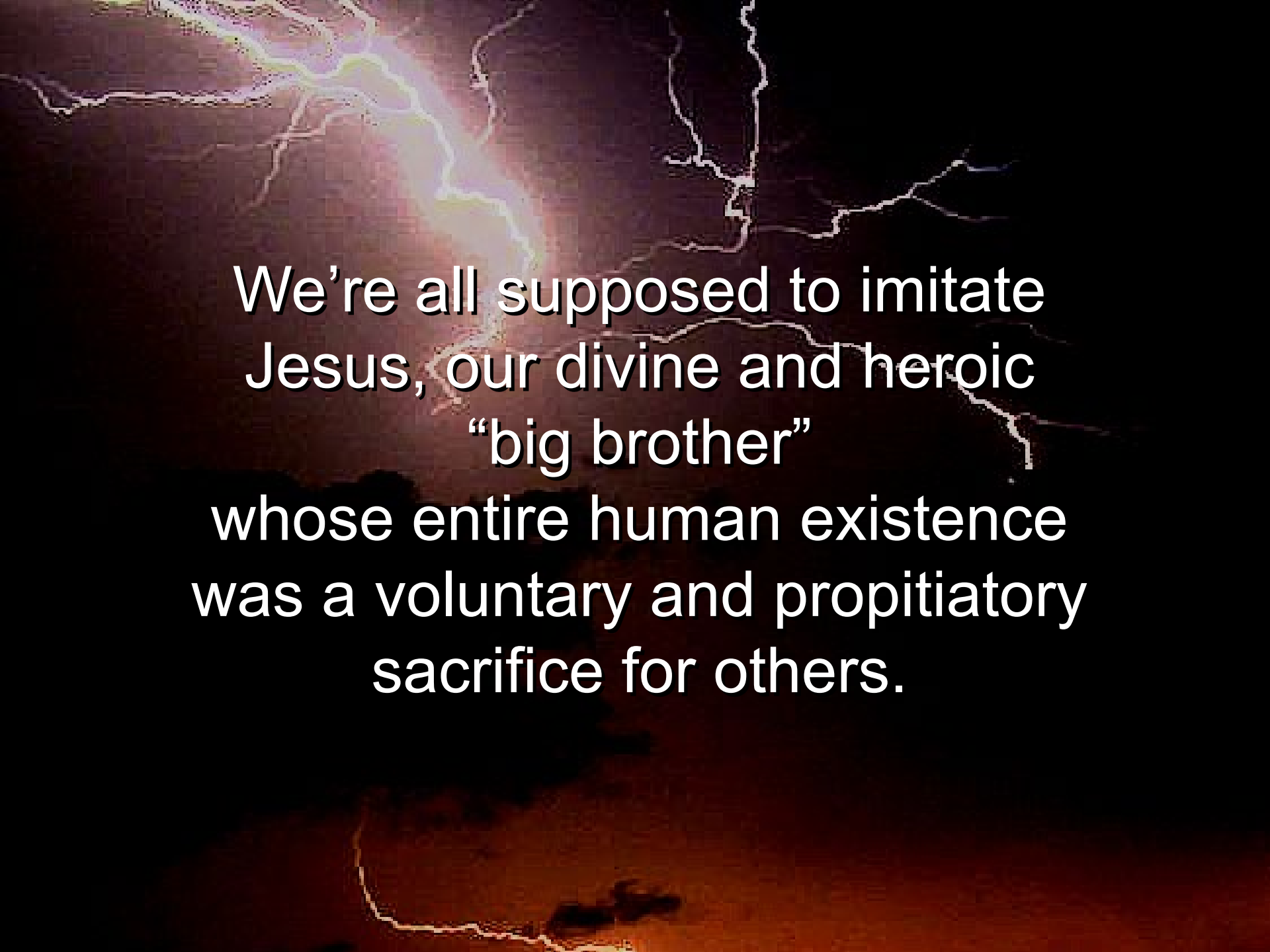


In His **divine humanity**, and by His own **merit**, Jesus, along with God the Father, and the Holy Spirit, **interceded** for us. With the cooperation of the Blessed Virgin, God accomplished the hardest part of the “work” of salvation, by becoming the **propitiatory** sacrifice who made **“Peace on Earth”** between God and man, a reality.

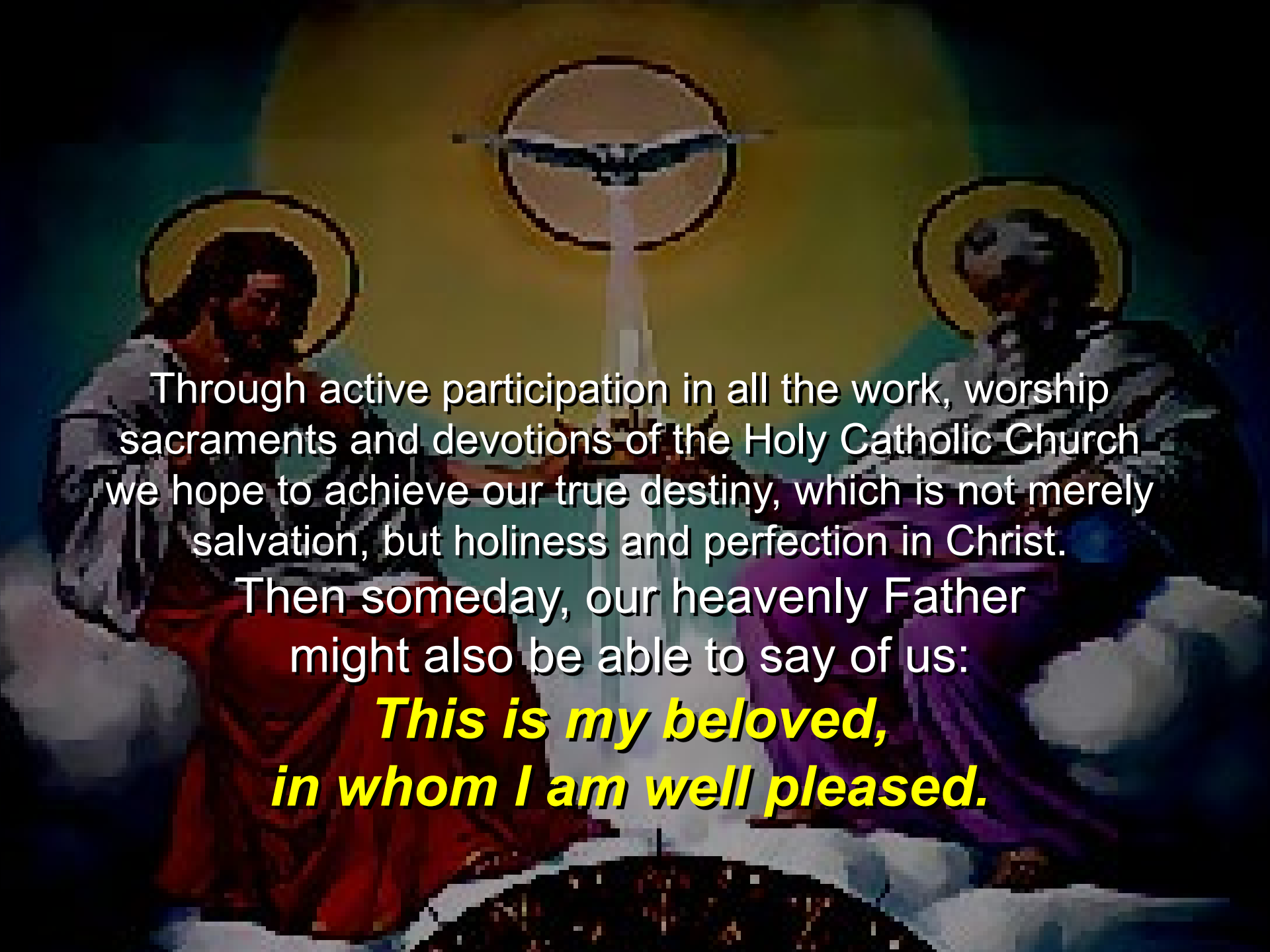
God decided to do it this way for our benefit. Not His!

Now it's left up to each one of us to affirmatively respond to God's grace, **accept** His gift, and **carry on** His great work.

We do this by **faithfully** striving to be **like Jesus**, empowered by His **grace**, guided by His **Holy Church**, constantly **renewed** and refreshed by the **Mass** and the **Sacraments**.



We're all supposed to imitate
Jesus, our divine and heroic
“big brother”
whose entire human existence
was a voluntary and propitiatory
sacrifice for others.



Through active participation in all the work, worship
sacraments and devotions of the Holy Catholic Church
we hope to achieve our true destiny, which is not merely
salvation, but holiness and perfection in Christ.

Then someday, our heavenly Father
might also be able to say of us:

***This is my beloved,
in whom I am well pleased.***