

IN NOMINE JESU

HOLY BAPTISM

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Our homily for this Wednesday in Lent, and this year, the Feast of the Annunciation, is taken from our inspired readings, with our thoughts guided by the following translation:

You all have (an) antitype - now Baptism saves - not (in a) setting off of dirt from (the) flesh, but of (a) good conscience asking God through (the) resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹

I added that text into your ears today for the confession that it contains – “Baptism now saves.” The text’s direct link in the context to the Lord’s salvation of the eight in the Ark through the Flood is revealed in the narration from our Old Testament reading. Since the middle of the 16th century AD, there have been churches that have tried, with some success, to change the Lord’s clearly revealed teaching regarding His chosen means of grace. Humanly well-intended souls have worked diligently to change the meaning of Holy Baptism from its divinely revealed salvific intent. They, for only around 450 years, have taught that God’s gift of the washing of regeneration and renewal may be merely a sign, seal or symbol (not that Baptism does not have elements of those things).

In order that we maintain the right confession, and right use of the Lord’s Sacrament of Holy Baptism, hear again Jesus’ confession regarding the same, declared first while the Eleven were reclining at table.

*[[Jesus] was manifested, and He reproached their unbelief and their hard-heartedness, because they had seen Him having been raised and they believed not. Then He said to them, "All of you have gone into the whole world. Proclaim the Good News to all the creation. The one continually believing and having been baptized will be saved, but the unbelieving one will be judged."*²

The Church notes that the teaching begins with the reality that the Eleven have already gone into the whole world. They, when they first numbered Twelve, before Jesus' death, at His command, went to the Jewish people with the Good News.³ They went into the world as Christ sent the 70 [72] into every city, Jew or Gentile, into which He was to go before He was slaughtered as the final and true sacrifice on account of sin.⁴

From those times, whenever, and wherever the disciples called by Jesus to proclaim His Good News – of His death for the forgiveness of sins – the Gospel continued to go into the world. The Lord's commission was not to go – but to preach the Good News, and to baptize, that people might believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God as they went through life.

There is no first "do this," and then "do this next," in the commission Jesus gives. The Commission in Mark is to Preach the Gospel. The assumption is that the preaching carries with it His baptism. There is no "believe first and then be baptized" in the language of Mark or any other Gospel. The Word of Jesus is simply: "preach,

¹ *I Peter* 3:21.

² *Mark* 16:14-16.

³ *Matthew* 10:1-14; 11:1.

⁴ *Luke* 10:1-17

believe, baptize.”

St. Paul, the Twelfth Apostle, added to the Eleven by Jesus (remember the replacement for Judas was chosen by the Eleven as God’s mediators, not immediately by Jesus), further enhances our understanding of God’s chosen mystery regarding Holy Baptism, proclaims:

Or do all of you not continue to know that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus, into His death we were baptized? We have been buried together with Him through the Baptism into the death that, just as Christ was raised from (the) dead through the glory of the Father, thus also we in newness of life might walk about.⁵

Our Lenten emphasis has brought us to the right confession of Holy Baptism. That is that through His chosen means, Water and the Word, God saves. Those who are saved through Baptism have already died with Christ, and have been raised to new life in Him. Therefore, the baptized believers, you, may conduct your life in Christ, free from sin and its eternal effects – hell and everlasting condemnation.

The groundwork for this week’s New Testament sacrament teaching has been laid among us over the past three Wednesdays with the teachings regarding the Ten Words, the Creed, and the Our Father. We have recalled how the Law shows us our sin and need for God to provide the Savior Who shed His blood to cover our sins against the Law. We have remembered how the ancient confession centers us on the revealed mercy of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We have heard the Lord’s

⁵ Romans 6:3-4.

own prayer that assures us that Our Father hears our prayers for His sake.

Built upon those foundations, the teaching of the Church is declaring the means that God chose to use to grant the offspring of sinners, sinful in themselves, the right to be One with Him. That, dear ones, is the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Since that Sacrament, by its very nature, is God's work, you may depend on it every day of your life. It was not your faith, nor something good in you – some spark of the divine, or your good works, or good life – that brings salvation to you. It is fully the gift of God, granted to you from His sure and certain Word and combined with simple water, that brings you forgiveness and eternal life.

Lest you forget this, the Baptismal liturgy here contains this teaching, drawn from the Word of God, and contained in part in the “Small Catechism:” *through Holy Baptism poor sinners are adopted into God's family in the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit: without God's Word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the Word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth of the Holy Spirit.*⁶ I Peter simplifies that with these words: *Baptism saves.* Clear enough?

Well, not for some. That which has been called the fastest growing segment of Christianity confesses: *God foreknows who will respond positively to [His] grace, and they are the ones he predestines to be conformed to the image of his Son and to be*

*with him in heaven.*⁷ What that means is that salvation is in view of one's coming to faith. Baptism, then, for them, is simply a sign of what the person has already decided.

Others teach that Baptism is an ordinance of Jesus. That means it is law, to be done because He commanded it. They hold that baptism is an obligation of every believer. Baptism is, for them, man's work because Jesus said, "do it." They believe it is simply a sign of the baptized person's fellowship with the death and resurrection of Jesus, a sign of forgiveness, and a sign of a person's giving himself or herself to God.

Still others teach that sacraments are ordained of Christ. They hold that they are more than tokens of Christian confession, that they are certain signs of grace. The key there is that they would hold that God works grace and salvation, and the Holy Baptism is a sign so that Christians know that God is at work.

There are other confessions also that speak of Holy Baptism in terms of sign and seal into the New Covenant. The largest confession in Christianity, in terms of numbers, holds that Baptism washes away sin. But, they hold that it does not remove actual sins after baptism. For removing those sins, they have other so-called means of grace. Baptism is, for this huge body of believers, the beginning of new life.⁸

Against all those other doctrines regarding Baptism stands the clear Word of God, in context, in purity, and confessed rightly by those who would be true Church

⁶ "The Office of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism: the Lutheran Formula of 1526.

⁷⁷ *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God*, ed. Bruce A. Ware, p.170.

⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 356.

throughout the ages. It is to God's Baptism of you by the water and Word of God that you are being called to return each day. In that one Baptism you received, you have all the forgiveness, grace and mercy of God. So, how then are you to return to your Baptism each day?

First, you sorrow over and turn from your sins.

Then, having confessed your sins and remembered God's forgiveness, you walk in the new life of Christ.

You may remember your Baptism in any number of healthy traditions.

You may, at the invocation and benediction of the Lord's service, make the sign of the Holy Cross from forehead, to breast and shoulder to shoulder. You may incline your body and the name of the Triune God. You may follow the instructions of the "Small Catechism" and make the sign of the cross upon yourself before your morning and evening prayers. You may remember it when you look to the font in the Nave. You may recall the flood that washed away your sins when you shower or bathe. There is no limit to the things, signs and symbols that can be used to remember one's baptism.

No matter what aides you to remember that you have already died with Christ and risen to new life in Him, you can hold fast to the Word of the Promise for this day:

You all have (an) antitype - now Baptism saves - not (in a) setting off of dirt from (the) flesh, but of (a) good conscience asking God through (the) resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁹

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Lent IV Wednesday

Genesis 6:17-7:1; Romans 6:1-11; Mark 16:14-16

March 25, 2009

Pastor Michael A. McCrehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

ὁ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σώζει βάπτισμα, οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ῥύπου ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν, δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,¹⁰

⁹ *I Peter* 3:21.

¹⁰Aland, B., Aland, K., Black, M., Martini, C. M., Metzger, B. M., & Wikgren, A. 1993, c1979. *The Greek New Testament* (4th ed.) . United Bible Societies: Federal Republic of Germany