

Chapter 15: Baptism

“Just as our natural living cannot proceed without a birth, so our supernatural life cannot proceed without our baptism.” Scott Hahn, Signs of Life

The famous king and saint, Louis IX of France, knew that his life began when he was baptized. The saintly king signed his documents “Louis of Poissy” – not “Louis IX, King.” His reason? Poissy was the place of his baptism. He held it in higher regard than Rheims Cathedral, the site of his coronation. He said, “It is ... greater ... to be a child of God than to be the ruler of a kingdom. This last I shall lose at death, but the other will be my passport to an everlasting destiny.”

St. Ambrose of Milan, AD389, in his Commentary of Luke 2:83, said, “The Lord was baptized, not to be cleansed Himself but to cleanse the waters, so that those waters, cleansed by the flesh of Christ which knew no sin, might have the power of Baptism.” (also Matt. 3:13-17)

* John 3:5 - “Amen, amen I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.”

* John 14:6 - “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by me.”

* Matthew 28:18-20 - “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” A disciple is more than just a believer – he is a disciplined follower, a “doer of the Word” (James 1:22).

Adam & Eve

Adam and Eve were created in a state of original grace, created without original sin, but they sinned and lost this precious gift – consequently, they could not pass on to their children a spiritual gift that they no longer had.

* We refer to it as “original sin” but it is really the “original consequence” of their sin (Adam and Eve were created WITHOUT original sin and still they blew it!)

* Their sin was no ordinary sin – it didn’t affect only them, it affected all mankind forever (true of ALL sin)

O.T. Prefigurements

* Genesis 1:1 – the Spirit overshadows the waters and brings life to earth

* Genesis 6-9 – Noah’s ark & the great flood – God purified the earth and brought about a new beginning – new life to the Christian who is baptized

* Exodus 14 – enslaved Israelites gained their freedom from the Egyptians when they crossed through the Red Sea – frees *us* from the slavery of sin

* Joshua 3 – Israelites finally crossed the Jordan River into Canaan, they entered the Promised Land – Jesus promises us eternal life in Heaven

* 2 Kings 5 – cure of Naaman the leper by bathing in the Jordan River – we are cleansed

Forms of Baptism

* Immersion (total dunking)

* Infusion (pouring)

* Aspersion (sprinkling)

* Trinitarian words (in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit)

Symbols

* Water – death and cleansing – share in the death and resurrection of Jesus and cleansed from sin

* Oil – healing, protection, and anointing – symbolizes that we are anointed as priest, prophet, and king in Christ: priest, offers sacrifice - prophet, spreads the Good News of God - king, serves the people

* White garment – one has “put on Christ” – the new purity of one’s soul – included in the ceremony is the admonition to keep the garment unstained by sin (Rev. 7:14).

* Candle – we have received the Light of Christ, and now our responsibility as Christians is to be a light to the world. The white garment and candle will appear again at the funeral liturgy, in the form of the white pall over the casket and the lighted Paschal candle.

Effects

* Sins forgiven, both original and personal – but our inclination to sin (“concupiscence”) remains in our imperfect humanity

* Adopted children of God – receive sanctifying grace – Baptism is not merely a ceremony or rite of passage. When we are born anew in baptism, we are born not of human parentage, but heavenly.

* Initiation into the Church and joined to all Christians – share in Christ’s mission

* Sealed with an indelible spiritual mark – St. Augustine compared this mark on our souls to the brand placed on soldiers and slaves in Roman times – our spiritual character marks us as belonging to Christ.

Adult Baptism

Adults who've never been baptized can receive this sacrament after a period of instruction (RCIA, private instruction). Unlike infants, adults learn about the faith *before* they are baptized. Some Protestant denominations view baptism as only symbolic, not sacramental, and will re-baptize Catholics who may join their churches, but the Catholic Church recognizes the baptism of most other Christian denominations (Trinitarian – in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) and re-baptizing a person is not necessary.

* Luke 15:11-32 - Parable of the Prodigal Son: the son was born into a good family – he left, lived badly for awhile, then came back. But he didn't need another 'adoption ceremony' to become a member of the family again.

However – Baptism also is not a “one-shot deal and you're in like Flynn” – we have to own it every day, have to make a conscious decision to live a Christian life.

* Ezekiel 18:21-24 – if a wicked man turns from his ways...

* 1 Corinthians 9:26-27 – “So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as though flailing the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, so that having preached to others I myself should not be disqualified.”

Infant Baptism

In the Old Testament, circumcision was the imperfect forerunner of Baptism. Through the Old Testament ordinance of circumcision, males formally entered into the Covenant with God. This requirement was incumbent on adults who converted as well as infant boys born into Jewish families. (Lev. 12:2-3)

* Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-39)

Obviously, the 8-day old infant could not ask for circumcision. His parents brought him to the Temple to be circumcised and thereby “covenanted” with God on behalf of their child. In the same way, the Baptismal promises and profession of faith are made by the parents and godparents on behalf of their child – then the emphasis is on the education of the child in the Faith.

* An important link between the Old and New Testaments - God elevated the ordinance of circumcision to a new and perfected level of grace - early Christians knew this well, knew that the sacrament of Baptism replaced the ordinance of circumcision. (Col. 2:11-12)

* Baptismal font has 8 sides – hearkens back to circumcision on the 8th day.