

When was the last time you thought about your Baptism? Now, maybe you don't remember your Baptism—meaning that it has been a few years—and maybe you were just a baby. But that's not the kind of *remembering* I mean.

Perhaps you noticed, we keep the font right in the middle of everything that we do. We pass it on the way to the chancel—to the altar. We even begin the service with the invocation—which are the words of Christ used at your Baptism—in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

And this is also what the sign of the cross is all about. It's not good luck so you can kick your field goal. It's not some superstition meant to ward off evil. And it is not too Catholic. Our reverence should never be shamed.

Remember that Luther tells us to make the sign of the cross in the Small Catechism. And the Anglicans and the Orthodox make the sign of the cross too. The sign of the cross is to remember what God has done for us in Baptism. It means to find our purpose for living in what God worked in us at Baptism.

And on this Sunday, as the Church commemorates the Baptism of our Lord in the Jordan—we find ourselves invited—not just to witness a holy event—but to step into a new pattern of reality itself.

Jesus tells John the Baptist that He needs to be baptized to fulfill all righteousness. Christ didn't need Baptism—but we do.

And with Jesus' Baptism, God brings great significance to our own Baptisms. In fact, our Baptisms would be quite meaningless without what Jesus does here in the Jordan. And so, He descended into the waters to sanctify them. To make the deep waters a place of rebirth. To show us the way from death into life.

This moment is layered with mystery. The Holy Trinity is revealed. The Father speaks. The Spirit descends. The Son rises from the waters. But look closer. This is also Genesis again. The Spirit once hovered over the waters at creation. And again, at the flood's end, a dove returns to Noah with the sign of a new world. Now, Christ is the new Adam. And the Church is the new Ark. In Jesus' Baptism, all creation—and that includes us—begins again.

In Romans 6, our Epistle reading today, Paul is clear. Baptism isn't just a tradition, a ritual, or a family expectation. It isn't insurance against death and hell. It is not just getting your name recorded on a list. It isn't even a public proclamation of the faith.

To be baptized—is to be baptized into Christ. It is to step into a cosmic pattern that Christ Himself revealed in the Jordan. Just as He descended into the waters and rose to receive the Spirit, we too must follow Him—down into death—and up into new life.

The waters are chaos, sin, and the old world—just like the flood, just like the formless deep in Genesis. When we are baptized, we don't just get wet. We die to the old man—the ego, the passions, the false self.

And when we rise from those waters, sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, we become something entirely new. Not just better. New. We're not just forgiven—we're re-created. Baptism heals the soul. It saves us.

This isn't symbolic. It's sacramental. This isn't private. It's embodied. To be baptized is to enter the Kingdom—here and now—through the life of the Church—through the Liturgy—through the communion of the saints.

But here is the thing, as we look at Paul's words in Romans—the work of Baptism continues. Sure, we only get baptized once. But even if we can't remember it—even if we haven't thought about it in years—the power of Baptism is still there for us.

Baptism is death, resurrection, and renewal. It's not just how we begin the Christian life. It's how God transforms everything. Christ reveals the path. And the Church walks us through it.

The proclamation that Christ died and rose again isn't just a statement about the past. It's a doorway into a new way of being. The Cross isn't just a historical moment—it's a pattern that shapes our love, our forgiveness, our suffering, and our hope. The Resurrection isn't just about an empty tomb—it's about a new creation in Christ, one that redefines how we live.

In the Church, we gather to participate in a life. And it is a life of worship and repentance. A life of obedience. A life that is going in a particular direction. It is the life of Christ. And this has particular implication for sin—specifically the sins in which we find ourselves so easily entangled. Baptism is a washing away of sin. It means we are done with them. So, let's be done with them.

I like the way Paul says it in our reading. He shows us what a proper understanding of the intersection of Baptism and sin truly looks like. He asks and answers, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”

Grace can overcome all sin. And Paul knows the objection is coming. If grace abounds in ways that always overcome our sin, then aren't we free to sin as much as we want? And in the strongest words possible in the Greek language, Paul says absolutely not. By no means. This is totally unreasonable if we truly understand grace, faith, righteousness, Christ, and Baptism.

We cannot continue to sin as if nothing has happened. Something has happened to us that changes our whole situation. Baptism is death to sin. We cannot live in it anymore. And there is one particular kind of sin that I want to address today. And this sin is prevalent—although it is also subtle and difficult to see. Sometimes, it even masquerades as virtue.

There are broad categories of sin. If you do a word study sometime of all the various Hebrew words for sin in the Old Testament—for instance—you will find nuance. Sin can mean *to miss the mark, or to stray*. It can mean *open rebellion, a break with God—a stubborn departure from God's path—betrayal—unfaithfulness*. Sin can even mean *an inner depravity—a distortion of the soul*.

These aren't just words. They're the diagnosis of our hearts. They show us how sin fractures us—not just morally, but relationally, spiritually, communally. And yet—the deeper the diagnosis—the greater the healing.

And so, we see that Christ didn't come to merely forgive isolated acts. He came to put sin to death in us. He came to transform us entirely—to restore our communion with

God, His Church, and one another. That's the deeper grace of Baptism. It's not just about avoiding punishment—it's about being made whole.

Now clearly, as Paul says that we have died to sin—he doesn't mean that temptation is gone—or that we are incapable of sinning. Thus, he gives us the command at the end of our reading, "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

Instead, he wants to connect us with the death of Christ. And he wants to show us this powerful shift of the state in which we live. We who are in the faith no longer live under the dominion of sin. And on this basis, we cannot continue living in sin—in the way that we used to—or even in the way we may still desire to live. The body of sin is to be brought to nothing. We are no longer enslaved. We have died to sin and are alive to God in the Baptism of Christ.

And in this light, let's get specific. Even though we have defined sin so thoroughly today, let's address one critical rebellion—as I suggested before—that may feel a lot like virtue.

Martin Luther once said, "Be careful not to measure your holiness by other people's sins." I am reminded of *The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector* from Luke 19. You remember this one. Two men go up to the temple to pray. The tax collector's sin is evident to all—he has swindled his own people—he has aligned with the Roman oppressors. But here he prays the prayer that should be on our lips everyday, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" Jesus tells us that he left the temple that day justified. And it is the only time Jesus uses that word—*justified*—that we find all over the book of Romans.

But the Pharisees prayer is quite different. He says, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get."

Can you see what happened here? Of course, we should not be extortioners or adulterers—or even like this tax collector. There are problems with this man's life—although this is why he came to the temple this day. And good for him. But the Pharisee has entered into a more serious sin. He doesn't seek repentance. He is only able to see the sins of others—and not his own. And that's a dangerous place to be.

Maybe this takes place in things we say about others over the phone—with gossip and disapproval. Maybe this is our voice on social media—cruel and condescending.

It is easy to see the sins of others. It is easy to criticize. But if this is the way we are oriented—we are facing the wrong way. It has been said like this, "Clean your room before you criticize the world." This is good advice. In most cases, God has not given you the task of fixing the sins of others. He has called you to die to your own. Let's start there.

Maybe this manifests in the way we speak about the Church. Of course, there is no perfect local Church. We can see its flaws. We have our own. But there is a perfect Lord who perfects us through His Body, the Church. Again, change the direction of your gaze. The Church, as the body of Christ on earth exists to heal our souls—and to offer the forgiveness of sins to all who will repent and receive the Word of Christ in faith.

And so, with Paul, we consider ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. It's a good place to be. Baptism means that we have been united with Christ. We are

incorporated into His body—the Church. We are caught up into the life of Christ. And salvation is not just a moment in the past—but the ongoing work that Baptism pours into our hearts.

How can we who died to sin still live in it? Sin has no place with us. And let's start with this one. Give up the spirit of criticism. Let's be done with pointing out each other's flaws. Forgive the sins of others—even when they don't ask for it—even when they don't deserve it. Remember, grace is never deserved—the grace you give—and the grace you receive from God.

Instead, let's change direction, and start battling against our own sins. Let's be aware of them—confess them—put them to death. Live in your Baptism. Remember your Baptism. Remember the life that Christ brings to you in this way. And live in the grace of one who prays, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on *me*, a sinner.” In the name of Jesus. Amen.

+*Soli Deo Gloria*+