



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, St. Paul talks about the gift of the Sacrament of Baptism. Before I get into what Baptism is, I want to start with Sacrament. For those who grew up in the Baltimore Catechism era, you'll remember that a Sacrament is "an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace." Jesus established the Sacraments as things we can hear and touch and taste and see (outward signs) to bring us into relationship with God (to give grace). Another definition is that a Sacrament is a sign that makes real what it signifies. In Baptism, then, the signs of Baptism become real.

So what are the signs of Baptism? When we look at these, we often think of water as washing, quenching thirst, giving life. We can see how these signs become real in Baptism: we are washed clean of Original Sin as well as all Actual Sin; the Holy Spirit – the living water (John 4:10, 7:38-39) – comes to live in us quenching our thirst for God; we are giving the pledge of eternal life.

There is another sign of Baptism that we don't like to think about, and this is the sign St. Paul talks about today. Water can bring death. We look at the uncontrolled power of water in a flood, people caught in an undertow in the ocean, or those who just don't know how to swim and fall into a body of water – and they can drown. Water can bring death. St. Paul says in today's second reading: "**Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?**" (Romans 6:3). Baptism signifies that we have to die to ourselves so that we can live for Christ. And it makes this real. We are no longer the same after Baptism. In Baptism, we become the children of God, in such a way that we will *never stop* being children of God. Even should we reject God eternally, and so choose to go to Hell, we go as His Children. When we are baptized, something inside of us dies.

This sounds depressing (and I don't usually bring this up at baptisms, since I don't want the parents to freak out). But there is Good News: "**We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life**" (Romans 6:4). We die in Baptism so that we can rise again to new-life – life in Christ! We go down into the waters of Baptism in order that we can climb out to new life.

We lose some of this symbolism when we look at modern baptisms (though the power is still the same), but in the old churches of Europe, the Baptistries were set into the floor. To be baptized, you had to climb down into them (usually three steps), be immersed fully in the water, and then climb out on the other side. This symbolized going into a tomb to come out again. In baptism, we put on Christ, and, as St. Paul says, we are baptized into His death so we can rise again.

This reflection on Baptism gives us the opportunity to reflect on what areas of our lives need to die? We all have parts of our lives that we still cling to, that we have not surrendered fully to God. Let us call out to God for the grace given us in Baptism and ask that He take those areas of our lives so that they may drown in Him – dying to our selfishness and impurities – and be resurrected in Him.