

His Baptism and His Blood

I - What is Baptism?

What is Baptism? That is a question well worth asking, particularly if one does not know the answer, and one well worth answering, if one does.

To many Christians, it seems, Baptism is not much more than a footnote to the faith, or rather a parenthesis in a footnote. And many Christians have a hard time coming to terms with Baptism to begin with, what it is, and why it is. Opinions abound as to what Baptism is. And the many different opinions as to what Baptism is, and to whom it should be given, well, usually they reflect different ideas as to what *salvation* is, and to whom God can be allowed to grant His salvation. Actually, usually they reflect different answers to begin with to the question as to whether salvation really *is* the gracious gift of God granted to sinners, or something completely different.

The only thing, it seems, most Christians can agree upon, when it comes to Baptism, is that Baptism is not really all that important. And meanwhile, to some who insist that Baptism matters but little, it is of the utmost importance that Baptism *not* be given to all those to whom our Lord Jesus commanded that it be given, and certainly not to the little ones. To some, it seems, that is really all that matters. I observe it often, how deeply this has been engraved in the minds of some, that it does not matter much to their parents or the church in which they grew up which way they otherwise go in life, as long as there is one thing they will never do, and that is to accept the Baptism of infants.

On the other hand, oddly enough, those who insist that Baptism does not matter, or what one believes about Baptism, and that they believe exactly the same as we do, well, to some of them it seems awfully important to belittle what we believe and shame us into abandoning what we believe, even though, allegedly, it does not matter.

All this is somewhat strange, particularly in light of how much Holy Scripture makes of Baptism.

Our Catechism reminds us how our Lord Jesus gives His command with regards to Baptism at the very end of the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, so as to have it stand as the conclusion to all that He has taught: *Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Matthew: "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."*

This command our Lord Jesus gives, in the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, when He first meets His Apostles after His sufferings and death; to all who bother to pay attention, this goes to show that Baptism does matter, and very much so. And His command makes it clear that it is by means of Baptism all nations are to be made to belong to our Lord Jesus as His disciples.

Truly, Baptism is not just a matter of human activity, nor one cultural custom among others among Christians; it is not just a matter of plain water, rather, *it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's Word*, as our Catechism says, and at the very heart of the Word of God.

We learn this, also, from what we heard tonight of the Passion of our Lord Jesus. For we learn tonight who He is, our Lord Jesus. He is God Himself. When His enemies came for Him, and He asked for whom they had come, He identified Himself by the name by which God identified Himself to Moses: *I am*. Or more directly, as it is in the original New Testament Greek: *I am I am*. And such is the power of His Word, who is the Son of God, and God Himself from eternity, and the eternal Word of God by whom all things were made, that when He spoke His name: *I am!*, His enemies could not but draw back and fall to the ground.

But why is it, then, that the Son of God, who is Himself God, had to pray in agony, as we heard it tonight: *My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me?* Why is it that He had to have Himself given over into the hands of sinners so as to, as He said it, *drink the cup that the Father has given to me*, He who could not only immediately call upon *more than twelve legions of angels*, but also have His enemies fall before His feet in endless terror? As He has spoken by His Prophet: *He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked*.

Well, the answer is Baptism. *I have a Baptism with which to be baptised*, He had said, *and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!* What was to be, in that night, was exactly that: the fulfilment of His Baptism.

He had had Himself baptised with sinners. And the witness to His Baptism had pointed to Him: *Behold, the Lamb of God who bears and takes away the sin of the world*. For in His Baptism He would fulfil all righteousness, as He had said at His Baptism that it was for.

Baptised with sinners, He had had Himself made one with sinners in order that sinners, baptised into Him, might be one with Him in His righteousness, that is: His full and complete goodness and innocence before God.

In order that sinners might be rescued from eternal death and damnation under His judgement, He would Himself bear His judgement against all sin, and against all sinners. Therefore is it also that what He said, as we hear it tonight, when He gave Himself over to judgement and death, was this: *If it is I that you seek, let these go!*

He gave Himself over to judgement and death in order that His disciples might be let go of judgement and death. And not only those few of His disciples who were there with Him in that night, but all those of all nations and of all ages who were to be made to be His disciples, baptised into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

And the judgement to which He gave Himself over in order that His disciples might go free was not only the judgement of the Jews, or the Romans, unto death, but also the judgement unto *eternal* death, the judgement of God against all sin, all evil and ungodliness and impurity of sinners, which He had taken upon it Himself, in His Baptism, to bear for sinners, along with the judgement of God against it.

Only in this manner could He *fulfil all righteousness*, as He had said it at His Baptism, for our salvation. Otherwise, the fulfilment of all righteousness would mean for us sinners to suffer ourselves forever in Hell. For such is the goodness of God that He hates evil. And all righteousness, as well as His own goodness, demand that all evil be made good. And such a great evil is sin, that only eternal death can make up for it, eternal sufferings in that ferocious fire which the goodness of God is against evil.

Only He who is from eternity the Holy One of God, and God Himself, could bear and take away the judgement of God against sin for the salvation of sinners. Only His holiness and righteousness could outweigh our sin, His goodness and innocence our evil. Only He could pay the price and penalty for sin in full, and in abundance, so as to suffice for the salvation of sinners.

Truly no man can ransom another, as the Psalm says it, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should live on for ever and never see the pit.

No effort of ours at goodness and godliness can make us right with God; for not only is *the flesh weak*, as we hear it tonight that our Lord Jesus said it, but *that which is born of the flesh is flesh*, as He has also said it, and *the intent of the flesh is enmity against God*, as He has had His holy Apostle Paul write it, of sinful nature, that is, *and it does not submit to the Law of God, indeed, it cannot.*

Sin in us will not allow us to love God, not as He really is, and submit to His goodness. At heart, our own attempts at goodness and godliness are nothing other than our attempt to make ourselves out to be gods, to be our own saviours, masters ourselves of good and evil, rather than allow God alone to be God, and the Giver all things good, and of all goodness. As such, our attempts at establishing goodness and godliness of our own are themselves sinful and sin, and earn us only judgement and death. As we hear it tonight that our Lord Jesus said to His disciples of their attempts to save their Saviour: *All who take the sword will perish by the sword*. By our very attempts to make ourselves righteous and right before God, we reject His goodness as our salvation; and by claiming goodness and godliness on account of our feeble attempts, we belittle His goodness, and the goodness we owe to Him. And all of this is no less an insult to the goodness of God than it is to betray the Son of Man with a kiss, as Judas did.

This is the judgement God in Holy Scripture announces upon all human goodness and godliness. Only in what our Lord Jesus has done for us is salvation available for sinners. And only by what He does for us is righteousness to be obtained by sinners, given to us with His Word, as it was in our Baptism.

From what we hear tonight, we learn that Baptism is at the heart of what our Lord Jesus has done for us, and does for us, for our salvation. As our Catechism says it: *Baptism is not just plain water, but it is the water included in God's command and combined with God's Word*. It is not an indifferent thing, for us to speculate upon and make of whatever we will, and whatever seems good to us. It is not to be made into a demonstration of our decision and dedication and determination for goodness and godliness; this is an idolatrous abuse of the gracious gift of God, similar, again, to betraying the Son of Man with a kiss.

And an equally idolatrous abuse of the gracious gift of God is it to use Baptism as an excuse for indifference and ungodliness in the assurance that since I am baptised, I need not pay any further attention to God; woe to the one who thus uses Baptism to blaspheme against that very goodness of God which is our only salvation.

But blessed are we when we live the Baptismal life, in the Word and worship of the goodness of God, in which His salvation is given to us still, fully and for real, with His Word, as it was in our Baptism, all by means of *His* Baptism.

O Christ our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. *Amen*.