

His Baptism and His Blood

IV - What benefits does Baptism give?

For some of us, it might be that the greatest comfort we find in what we hear from our Catechism tonight might be the words: *to all who believe this*.

So often, Christians who reject what our Church teaches about Baptism, because Holy Scripture teaches it, seem to think that what we believe is what all who were once baptised will be saved on the day of judgement, whether or not they lived all their life in sin and ungodliness, whether or not they believed in Jesus.

But we can point to what we hear of our Catechism tonight. So *our Church* also teaches that it is only to those who *believe this* that Baptism gives eternal salvation. So we are not as bad as the Baptists think, and others who reject the teaching of Holy Scripture, that *Baptism now saves you!*, as the holy Apostle Peter writes it. Our Church also teaches that salvation is not for everybody. And that is great relief, for we cannot have that, can we, that everybody be saved. That would indeed be awful, now, would it not?

Except that what our Catechism actually says is not that Baptism gives eternal life *only* to those who believe, but rather that it gives eternal life to *all* who believe. Just as Holy Scripture says, not that God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son in order that *only* those who believe in Him should have eternal life, but rather that He did so in order that *all* who believe in Him should. And that makes a world of difference; literally a world. It is *the world God so loved*, that is: all sinners, not only those who are good enough to be saved, good enough at believing in Jesus, good enough at loving Him.

The comfort our Catechism sets before us with what we hear tonight is a different one entirely, the comfort Holy Scripture itself sets before us, that salvation is given to real sinners such as ourselves out of the goodness of God, and *His* goodness alone; which means that our own goodness does not come into it, or our lack of goodness.

Holy Scripture sets an illustration of this before us, also, with what we heard tonight of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Barabbas was, as we heard it, *a notorious prisoner*; his evildoings were well known to the general public. Nevertheless, when the governor gave them the choice, the Jews chose for our Lord Jesus to be crucified, and for Barabbas to be released.

Thus God had worked it, in His wisdom, and provided an imagery and illustration of what His salvation is: that the Innocent be condemned to death, and the evildoer set free to live instead.

Christ suffered once for sins, writes the holy Apostle Peter, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God. Our Lord Jesus is the Son of God, one with the Father and the Spirit in holiness and goodness. And He had Himself baptised with the Baptism of sinners to make Himself one with us sinners in our sin, and to make sinners one with Himself in His righteousness, that is: His goodness and innocence before God. As the holy Apostle Paul writes it, Him who know of no sin God made to be sin for us in order that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

As our Lord Jesus was chosen by the Jews to die, rather than the notorious evildoer Barabbas, so God chose for His Holy One to die, rather than us sinners, into the fullness of death, the judgement of God against sin and evil.

So the Son of God had Himself baptised with sinners, to fulfil all righteousness, as He said it at His Baptism. *By sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an atoning sacrifice for sin, God condemned sin in the flesh, as the holy Apostle Paul writes it.*

In His sufferings the price and penalty was paid for the sin of all sinners, all evil and ungodliness and impurity, in order that we might be set free from eternal death and damnation and set free, instead, to live with God in His heavenly Kingdom. *Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God. As our Lord Jesus was chosen to be condemned and die, and Barabbas the evildoer set free to live, He was chosen by God to be condemned and die that we might be set free to live.*

And this God did for the world, that is: for all sinners. As the Holy Apostle Paul also writes it, *in Christ God reconciled the world to Himself, in that He does not count their trespasses against them. And all this is from God, as he also writes it, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself. It is all His goodness, and His goodness alone, that He does not count our sins and shortcomings against us, our evil and ungodliness. Our goodness does not come into it; for, in fact, we have none.*

And this means that His salvation is for all. With His sufferings and death God has condemned sin in the flesh; the price and penalty has been paid in full for the sin of all sinners.

This is why the Gospel is what it is, that is: the Word of God of His salvation.

Therefore the *Gospel* is His *promise*, spoken to all sinners; and therefore His salvation is *given* to all sinners, *really given*, fully and for real, with His promise: because His salvation is full and complete, with the sufferings of the Son of God. There is nothing missing, nothing lacking, nothing we sinners need to do, or could ever do, to complete it or improve upon it.

This is one further reason, in addition to the fact that He has commanded her to, that His faithful Church offers His promise of salvation in Baptism also to the little ones, those who are obviously incapable of doing anything for their own salvation, rather than only to adults, who might appear to be capable of contributing, somehow, to their own salvation, although, actually, they are not: because *all this is from God*; because the salvation of God is *His* salvation, and His alone; it is that which sinners cannot take for themselves, and which is evil and ungodliness for sinners to try to take for themselves, as it is only for God to give.

We do not look to Baptism as a mechanism of salvation, apart from God; rather, faith in Baptism is faith in God and His promise. It is He Himself who in Baptism forgives sins, *rescues from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as His words and promises declare*.

Our Catechism does remind us, though, with what we hear tonight, that our Lord Jesus did say not only that *whoever believes and is baptised will be saved*, but also that *whoever does not believe will be condemned*.

Thank God; there *is* something you have to do for your salvation. You have to believe! Such some might think, who reject what Holy Scripture teaches about Baptism, because they reject, to begin with, what Holy teaches about salvation itself, that it is always the gracious gift of God, and only that; although, usually, they will not actually say that *there is something you have to do*, because Holy Scripture teaches too clearly that there is not; but they will, nevertheless, speak as if *faith* is a thing sinners *have to do* to be saved.

Again, though, Holy Scripture teaches differently also about faith; as when the holy Apostle Paul writes that *by grace you have been saved, through faith; and this is not of yourselves, rather, it is the gift of God*.

When our Catechism reminds us tonight, that our Lord Jesus says that *whoever does not believe will be condemned*, the word Holy Scripture uses for *does not believe* is actually but one word, and in the active mode: *whoever unbelieves*. It speaks of *not believe* as something some sinners do, rather than something they do not do.

In other words, those who do not believe *actively reject* the salvation of God, promised to all sinners, and given to all sinners with His promise, in His Word, and given in Baptism to all the sinners who are actually baptised.

And it is certainly not a given that all sinners to whom God speaks His promise of salvation will actually know of Him and His salvation. We learn this, also, from what we heard tonight of the Passion of our Lord Jesus. Even the Jews, to whom God had first given His promises of salvation in Christ, would not know of Him and His salvation when He stood before them in flesh and blood; so severe was their hatred of Him that they would rather have the notorious evildoer Barabbas set free to live than the Son of God, who is Himself God, and is the salvation of God!

It is the very nature of sin to reject God and His goodness; that is why sinners, even after we have come to know the salvation of God to be *His* salvation, still have a such hard time coming to terms with the goodness of God; because sin in us cannot have it, that God really is as good as He is, that all things good are given to us out of His goodness alone, and our goodness does not come into it at all.

That is why some Christians reject the teaching of Holy Scripture about the salvation of God, and about Baptism. They cannot have it that the salvation of God has nothing to with anything they themselves have done; so they make *faith* into something they themselves have done. Some find comfort in thinking that they are saved because they have done *faith*, whereas those who do not do *faith* will not be saved. And because they cannot have it that the salvation of God is for everybody, and particularly not for everybody *else*, they cannot have it, either, that salvation is given to little ones in Baptism, because Baptism is not something little ones do themselves.

Others have a harder time believing that the salvation of God is for themselves; and it is to them God speaks comfort with what He teaches in Holy Scripture about Baptism, and *with* Baptism itself. Salvation is from God, given to sinners out of His goodness alone, with His promise, to all who believe it. And those who believe will seek Baptism, for He directs all who believe to be baptised, in order that each individual believer may *know* that the promise of God has been applied to him or her, and that as such, the salvation of God really also does apply to him or her, *as the words and promises of God declare*.

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