

The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed

<i>First Reading</i>	Wis 3:1-9
<i>Response</i>	The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6
<i>Second Reading</i>	Rom 6:3-9
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.
<i>Gospel</i>	John 6:37-40

The Second Reading for the Solemnity of All Souls, November 2nd, comes from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 6:3-9. And at first glance, this might seem like a strange reading for the Feast of All Souls, because it's focused on baptism, but when you look at Paul's language of connecting baptism to death, it'll begin to come clear. So let's look at Roman 6:3-9, and I'll try to unpack why this was chosen for today. Paul writes:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.¹

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

What is Paul saying here? Well, I would suggest to you that this is one of the most important passages in all of Paul's letters on the mystery of baptism, where Paul is giving you what might even be called a mystagogy of baptism. What do I mean by that? What does Mystagogy mean? Mystagogy comes from the Greek word, two greek words, *mysterion* and *ago*, which means to lead into the mystery. So mystagogy is a kind of catechesis that took place in the early Church, where they would try to help people go beyond the visible signs that they're seeing in a particular sacrament, whether it's Baptism or the Eucharist, to the invisible mystery behind the action, behind the rite, behind the symbols and signs that are part of the sacramental rite.

So here, Paul, of course, is practicing, and he himself has received, what we call the Sacrament of Baptism, being immersed in water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And the Romans to whom he's writing, are also familiar with the mystery, with the rite of baptism. But what he does here is bring out something he assumes they know rhetorically, but which is, in fact, something that I don't think we often think of when it comes to Baptism. When we modern Christians talk about Baptism, we will either tend to talk about Baptism as the sacrament through which we are incorporated into the body of Christ, made a member of the Church. And it certainly is that. We'll talk about Baptism as a sacrament of forgiveness, where the stain of original sin, for example, is forgiven, or any other sins that may have been committed if we're an adult receiving Baptism. That takes place during the sacrament. So it's the sacrament of the forgiveness of sins. And that is certainly true. Or sometimes you hear people talk about Baptism as the sacrament of new birth, right? Like Jesus says in John 3:5:

...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

So if you want to enter the Kingdom, you have to be born a new, born again, born of water and Spirit. It's a new birth through the power of the Spirit, and Baptism is certainly that as well. But what Paul's doing here is describing Baptism as the sacrament of crucifixion, or perhaps we should call it the sacrament of co-crucifixion. It is the sacrament through which a person mystically, sacramentally, but really, is crucified with Christ, dies with Christ, and through that death also

enters into the newness of life that anticipates the resurrection, like that which Christ himself experienced.

So you can see this, again, just go back to what Paul says now thinking of Baptism as co-crucifixion. He says:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

And I can imagine the first readers thinking, "Well, no, I didn't actually know that." That's a different way of looking at baptism. It's baptism into death. So Paul says we were buried with Him. Here, Paul appears to be presupposing a rite of Baptism that involves immersion, right? You go down into the water. It's analogous to being buried with Jesus, just like Jesus goes into the tomb, so too, you go down into the water. Just as Jesus goes down into the ground, so to speak, you too go down into the water. And then as Christ is raised from the dead in the realm of the dead, so too, we too are raised up out of the water to walk in the newness of life. And the implication of this theology is that if we've been united with Him in a death like His, so co-crucified with Him, then we will also be united with Him in a resurrection like His, co-resurrection, so to speak.

And Paul says something fascinating here. He says:

We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who has died is freed from sin.

Ah, here is the key. Why is it important to understand Baptism as co-crucifixion? Because if you understand Baptism as a kind of death, its a mystical death, you can understand how it frees you from sin. Because a person who dies is free from sin. You can't sin anymore after you are dead. That's probably the best part about dying, is that you can't sin anymore. So what Paul is doing is saying the freedom from sin that we all recognize as a result of physical death, is actually anticipated and inaugurated sacramentally through dying with Jesus, being crucified with Christ in the sacrament of Baptism. So just as a person who dies physically is

freed from sin, so now a person who dies mystically with Christ is also set free from the slavery to sin, so that they can walk in the newness of life in Christ through the power of the spirit. And so he says:

But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.

So what Baptism is about then, is a dying with Christ so that we might walk in the newness of life and also anticipate the freedom of the kingdom of the God that Christ already experiences, because after his resurrection not only does sin have no power over him, but death has no power over him. He has broken the bonds of sin and death so that all those who are baptized might follow him as well. So if you look here I have a little chart to highlight this approach to Baptism, just to help you understand the mystagogical approach that Paul is giving here in Romans 6.

<i>Visible Sign</i>		<i>Invisible Mystery</i>
Baptismal Immersion	→	Dying with Jesus
Emergence from Water	→	Rising with Christ

So on the one side you can see that the visible sign is baptismal immersion, going down into the water and then coming up out of the water. So you have baptismal immersion and what we might call baptismal emergence, going down and then coming up out of the water. And then on the other side, the invisible mystery that that visible sign is both signifying and effecting is dying with Jesus, or being crucified with Christ, and then rising with Christ to new life.

I hope this helps you to kind of think about Baptism in a different way because, I don't know about you, I've been to a lot of baptisms, but most of them have not emphasized this element of it, that the infant, or an adult, is about to be crucified with Christ, that you are about to die with Christ, so that you can rise with Christ, not only on the last day, but also now to walk in newness of life in the spirit.

And so, in order to kind of show this, I'd like to close with a quotation from the Catechism. One of the ones that really struck me the first time I ever read it, I was

looking at the Catechism, paragraph 1011 and 1012. This is in the section on Christian death and on the meaning of death. And I being struck by it because, if you've ever studied the theology of the sacraments, you'll probably have heard the idea that the sacrament of Baptism is completed by Confirmation, right? That Confirmation is the completion of Baptism, and that is certainly true in terms of the sacramental initiation, the rights of initiation. But according to the Catechism, the ultimate completion of baptism is not just Confirmation. The ultimate completion of baptism is physical death. Listen to these words and think about the mystery of baptism as co-crucifixion in light of them. Here I quote paragraph 1010:

Because of Christ, Christian death has a positive meaning: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

That's St. Paul.

"The saying is sure: if we have died with him, we will also live with him."

Also St. Paul.

What is essentially new about Christian death is this: through Baptism, the Christian has already "died with Christ" sacramentally, in order to live a new life; and if we die in Christ's grace, physical death completes this "dying with Christ" and so completes our incorporation into him in his redeeming act...

All right, so pause there. Notice what the Catechism is saying. Baptism is a sacramental dying with Christ in order to live a new life, and this sacramental dying with Christ is completed by physical death. Physical death completes what begins in your baptism and so completes your incorporation into Christ and his redemptive act. So at the end of the day, your baptism will only be completed at the hour of your death. So your whole life is a kind of baptismal mystagogy of being configured to Christ day by day, gradually, year by year, moment by moment, action by action, all the way until the very end of your life, at the moment of your physical death when you will be perfectly and completely configured to Christ crucified. Very powerful imagery here, and it explains why, in the Catholic

tradition, the moment of death is so important. I remember when I was a little boy, I think it was my mom who told me one time that the most important moment of your life is the moment of your death. And it might seem a little morbid, right? Especially to tell that to a kid. But it's actually just the truth, because the hour of our death, which we pray about every time we say the Hail Mary, for example, is the decisive moment. It is the decisive moment not only in the sense that it will determine the way we spend the rest of eternity, but also sacramentally, it's the moment that brings to completion the process of sanctification that was begun in our baptism, right?

So what's the most important day of your life? It's the day of your baptism. What's the most important hour of your life? It's the hour of your death because that's what completes your baptism and perfectly configures you to Christ. And that's why you'll see when you read the writings of the Saints, they are often so focused on death and so focused on preparing for their death. It's not because they're morbid, or because they're in some way fascinated by death for its own sake, but because they see the mystery of death according to the mystery of Christ's own passion and death and of our incorporation into that. So, for example, in the Catechism, paragraph 1011, we read:

In death, God calls man to himself. Therefore the Christian can experience a desire for death like St. Paul's: "My desire is to depart and be with Christ."

That is from Philippians 1:23.

He can transform his own death into an act of obedience and love towards the Father, after the example of Christ:

And then it gives three quotes here from the Saints. Ignatius of Antioch famously wrote:

My earthly desire has been crucified; ... there is living water in me, water that murmurs and says within me: Come to the Father.

So he wants to be joined with Christ. Then again, Saint Teresa of Avila said:

I want to see God and, in order to see him, I must die. St.

So she recognizes that death is the doorway to the Beatific Vision, therefore she desires it as a Christian. And then finally, St. Therese of Lisieux, in her final conversations where she said, she was passing:

I am not dying; I am entering life. (CCC 1011-12)