

“Life after Baptism”

Is there life after death? Some people would say “No” – that death is just the end of life. But the One who has been through death and the grave, and in His resurrection now lives – assures us that there is indeed life after death – and for all who believe in Him – there is life everlasting.

Is there life after Baptism? That’s what the Apostle Paul addresses in our text for today – and the answer should be obvious. It’s like asking, “is there life after birth?” The Scriptures clearly teach that Baptism is the new birth of water and the Spirit.

Jesus Himself says: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). St. Paul calls Holy Baptism “the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). To be baptized is to be born again.

In Romans 6 we see the source and the shape of this life after Baptism. Life after Baptism includes death – an ongoing death – a death to sin. Having been given new life by God’s grace in Holy Baptism – our sinful nature still lives in us – leading us into sin.

This is why God the Father sent His Son to be born into our flesh – so that He, the Innocent One – might die for the ungodly, and through His death, justify us before our Father in heaven. The Son of God comes to reconcile us to God – to declare us righteous before the Father in heaven.

And all of this is pure grace, pure gift – all the work of Christ our Savior. Therefore, St. Paul writes, that – “one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law” (Rom. 3:28). This is the source of our new life – in Christ – united to His death and resurrection.

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” It’s as if St. Paul is reading the mind of our Old Adam – our sinful nature, which is good at asking questions in order to get what he desires.

“If God freely and fully forgives all my sin for Jesus’ sake – does that mean that I can go on sinning, living how I please? If my sin results in God’s grace – should I sin more so that God is more gracious?”

“By no means!” Paul says in the strongest way possible. Why? Because the life after Baptism includes dying to sin.

Baptism is not an excuse to keep on sinning. It’s not an invisibility cloak so that God cannot see what you are doing. No, Baptism is not only living – but dying. It is God’s means of putting your sin to death. It’s His way of killing the sinner with all his sinful desires – so that you might be saved, and live in Christ’s heavenly kingdom.

That’s why the Apostle Peter says that – “Baptism now saves you” – it saves you by uniting you to the death of Jesus Christ – with whom your sinful nature and your sins are put to death and buried.

Sin brings death. It destroys our bodies. It brings an end to relationships and puts a stop to loving our neighbor. It separates us from God, and His life. But the death of Jesus gives life! For God was in Christ “reconciling the world to Himself by making peace by the blood of the cross.” To be baptized into Christ – is to be baptized into His death – a death that gives life.

This baptismal life you have been given is lived in union with Christ Jesus. In Baptism He put His Name on you, and you belong to Him. Where the Lord puts His Name, there He promises to dwell – to bless you with His forgiveness. This life you now live – is a whole new life – a life of dying to sin, and living in Christ by faith.

Folks, we live in a time of radical individualism where we’re told that we control who we are and what we do. You’re told that you can determine your own identity, and do whatever you want with your life – excusing all manner of sexual immorality, abortion, greed, living for yourself, and so on.

But the psalmist declares: “Know that the Lord, He is God! It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture” (100:3).

In Holy Baptism, God has claimed you as His own. That's why the baptismal liturgy says – "Receive the sign of the holy cross both upon your + forehead and upon your + heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified." Jesus Christ has purchased and won you, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.

Self-ownership is not an option. Either you belong to the Lord who suffered and died for you, or you belong to the prince of this world. There is no neutral ground. That's why the ancient baptismal liturgies included an exorcism – because in Holy Baptism, the devil is cast out and the Holy Spirit enters in – giving you new life in Christ.

In this baptismal life, the Holy Spirit continues to work through the Word of God to sustain your faith and life in Christ Jesus. Baptism is not a matter of "having it done" and then moving on in life – it is a continual return to Christ and the life He gives.

It is a daily dying to sin through repentance and faith – and daily being made alive by Christ's forgiveness so that you may walk in newness of life. You are no longer in bondage to sin, "for one who has died has been set free from sin."

Dearly beloved, "consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." As Luther writes in the Large Catechism: "Thus you see plainly that Baptism is not a work which we do but it is a treasure which God gives and faith grasps, just as the Lord Christ upon the cross is not a work but a treasure comprehended and offered to us in the Word and received by faith ... In Baptism, therefore, every Christian has enough to do to believe firmly what Baptism promises and brings – victory over death and the devil, forgiveness of sin, God's grace, the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with His gifts."

What great and glorious gifts God bestows on you in and through Holy Baptism. May He grant you faith to trust His merciful words, and live in the newness of life that belongs to His children, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.