

Ten After Ten Session 60: The Sacrament of Baptism

1213 Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission.

1214 This sacrament is called Baptism, after the central rite by which it is carried out: to baptize (Greek *baptizein*) means to “plunge” or “immerse”; the “plunge” into the water symbolizes the catechumen’s burial into Christ’s death, from which he rises up by resurrection with him, as “a new creature.”

1215 This sacrament is also called “the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit,” for it signifies and actually brings about the birth of water and the Spirit without which no one can enter the kingdom of God.

1216 This bath is called enlightenment, because those who receive this [catechetical] instruction are enlightened in their understanding.... Baptism is God’s most beautiful and magnificent gift.... We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal, and most precious gift. It is called gift because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own; grace since it is given even to the guilty; Baptism because sin is buried in the water; anointing for it is priestly and royal as are those who are anointed; enlightenment because it radiates light; clothing since it veils our shame; bath because it washes; and seal as it is our guard and the sign of God’s Lordship.

1217 In the liturgy of the Easter Vigil, during the blessing of the baptismal water, the Church solemnly commemorates the great events in salvation history that already prefigured the mystery of Baptism.

1218 Since the beginning of the world, water, so humble and wonderful a creature, has been the source of life and fruitfulness.

1219 The Church has seen in Noah’s ark a prefiguring of salvation by Baptism, for by it a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

1220 If water springing up from the earth symbolizes life, the water of the sea is a symbol of death and so can represent the mystery of the cross. By this symbolism Baptism signifies communion with Christ’s death.

1221 But above all, the crossing of the Red Sea, literally the liberation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, announces the liberation wrought by Baptism.

1222 Finally, Baptism is prefigured in the crossing of the Jordan River by which the People of God received the gift of the land promised to Abraham’s descendants, an image of eternal life. The promise of this blessed inheritance is fulfilled in the New Covenant.

1223 All the Old Covenant prefigurations find their fulfillment in Christ Jesus. He begins his public life after having himself baptized by St. John the Baptist in the Jordan. After his resurrection Christ gives this mission to his apostles: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”

1224 Our Lord voluntarily submitted himself to the baptism of St. John, intended for sinners, in order to “fulfill all righteousness...” The Spirit who had hovered over the waters of the first creation descended then on the Christ as a prelude of the new creation, and the Father revealed Jesus as his “beloved Son.”

1225 In his Passover Christ opened to all men the fountain of Baptism...The blood and water that flowed from the pierced side of the crucified Jesus are types of Baptism and the Eucharist, the sacraments of new life.

1226 From the very day of Pentecost the Church has celebrated and administered holy Baptism. Indeed St. Peter declares to the crowd astounded by his preaching: “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The apostles and their collaborators offer Baptism to anyone who believed in Jesus: Jews, the God-fearing, pagans. Always, Baptism is seen as connected with faith: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household,” St. Paul declared to his jailer in Philippi. And the narrative continues, the jailer “was baptized at once, with all his family.”

1227 According to the Apostle Paul, the believer enters through Baptism into communion with Christ’s death, is buried with him, and rises with him:

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.

1228 Hence Baptism is a bath of water in which the “imperishable seed” of the Word of God produces its life-giving effect. St. Augustine says of Baptism: “The word is brought to the material element, and it becomes a sacrament.