

YOU WERE BURIED WITH HIM IN BAPTISM

Last month when we were in the Holy Land we made a couple of stops along the River Jordan where John the Baptist baptized many Jews in those years right before Jesus burst on the scene. John Baptized Jesus himself. An event which was God's way of validating what John was doing, and at the same time adding the crucial element of the unleashing of the Holy Spirit which descended on Jesus in the form of a dove.

We visited the headwaters of the Jordan where the melting snow from Mount Hermon runs down and into the tributaries of the Jordan. We also visited a site farther down where many Evangelical Christians go for the express purpose of being baptized. Each time we stop there we encounter people from all around the world who have come to that place with the express purpose of being baptized into Jesus Christ in that very Jordan River. Often they are traveling with a group of believers from their church and their pastor. Those to be baptized are in the water with the pastor and they are asked if they have come here to be baptized into Christ and if they say that they are, they are then asked if they will accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. If they say, Yes, then they are completely immersed while hearing the words I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes there is a single immersion. Sometimes there is a threefold immersion.

In the Catholic tradition we baptize at a much earlier date, usually in infancy. From the earliest years of the faith parents have asked to have their children baptized into Christ even before they are old enough to understand what is happening. The parents promise to take care of educating their little ones in the ways of the Catholic faith. There is a realization that what happens in baptism is much more the initiative of the Lord than it is of us. We respond. The Lord takes us into himself. We are each baptized into Christ.

Listen to that line from Saint Paul: "You were buried with him (Christ) in baptism, in which you were raised with him by faith in the power of God." Buried with him. Going under the water is like drowning. Dying. And then coming up from the waters is like Jesus coming forth from the grave that everyone thought was going to be his final resting place. But He is risen. Baptism is the bringing into the life of each person that reality.

Most of us think of baptism as something that happened to us in the past on a certain day and time and in a certain place. Over and accomplished. But there is a deeper truth to the waters of baptism. They never end. The waters flow always. And each person baptized goes under those waters and is washed clean and renewed and

recreated. But it happens throughout our lives. IN the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We confess our sins and receive the very same forgiveness that was bestowed upon us in baptism. We are placed under the cleansing waters of baptism anew in that sacrament. And at Eucharist we are renewed and recreated again in the Body and Blood of Christ as we begin by calling to mind our sins, and then listening to the word of God and having it broken open for us, as food for our journey.

All throughout our live we actually live in and as part of the Body of Christ. And what effect does this baptism have? What practical effect? Well one place is in the area of our sin. The waters wash away our sins. The Lord did not come to ratify all the decisions we make in this life—the good and the bad. He came to show us how best to live, what the way of God is, how deep is the forgiving love of the Father. But God does not want us to give in to the sin of greed for example. Where we allow free rein to an inordinate desire for more—of everything, spiritual or material. God will not condone anything which is not good for us or beneficial to us. All of that has to go. Nor will the Lord simply allow us to move forward in our unforgiveness as if are somehow entitled to hold unforgiven those who have hurt or wounded us even though God has forgiven us for our selfish disregard of his way. Nor will simply invite us to enjoy our various lusts simply because we want to. It is the Lord's will to restore our original innocence but He will not do so against our will. The invitation to the kingdom of heaven and the access to this kingdom in and through baptism, is no automatic Free Pass. The Lord wants the embrace of our hearts. And he will do in us what we cannot do in ourselves but only when we give him entrée into the deepest dimensions of our lives—heart and soul.

God is good. And God bestows that goodness upon us if we allow Him to do so. And listen anew to the story of Abraham bartering with God about finding fifty good people or less. We all do some bartering with God. “Lord, if you do this for me, I will do that for you.” But notice that the Lord speaks of the power of finding the good and how the good will divert destruction. There is such power in that which is good. And that is what we lose sight of. The power of the good far outperforms the deceiving power of the enemy. Filled with all manner of lies and illusory promises but always ending in disaster, disappointment and destruction. The enemy is a parasite. Attaching to our goodness and seeking to drain the life out of us. The waters of baptism bring forgiveness, refreshment, goodness and grace which cannot be overcome. And the gates of Hell shall not prevail. The waters of baptism will never end and will always bring life. On a hot summer day. That sounds like a very good deal.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.