

BAPTISM

Our Life in Christ

Living the Sacraments

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INTRODUCTION

In the striking words of St. Paul, Baptism is the putting on of "a new nature created after the likeness of God in the true righteousness and holiness". (*Eph. 4:24*) Through this sacrament we come alive in a new way "As in the first Adam all died," wrote St. Paul, "so in the new Adam all are made alive." (*1 Cor. 15:22*) This essay is an attempt to show something of the newness of life that Baptism creates in us so that we may live that life to the full. Since most of us were baptized in infancy, the present task could equally well be described as an attempt to show how we can ratify by an adult commitment the way of life that was opened up to us by the gift, and powers we received at Baptism.

In this study there will be four sections corresponding to the four stages of the history of salvation.

THE TIME OF PREPARATION

God the Creator:

What happens in Baptism simply cannot be understood except as a further step towards that completeness which God intended for all men when he made them in his own image and likeness.

God created man as a partner in a dialogue, a partner who can recognize his creator, speak to him, love him and live for him.

Despite the fact that at an earlier time we enjoyed a relationship of friendship with God, there can be no doubt that in the present Order of the world, an order that had its origin in the rejection of God's friendship, the dialogue between God and man reaches its high point in Christ. Christ in a single action forgave the sin we had inherited and raised us to a new level of union with God. For us the first experience of this new mode of life comes through Baptism. In Christ *the earthly man becomes the heavenly man*, and this in a twofold sense. Not only may man live the life of a Son of God here and now, but he has in himself the germ of a future way of life. After death we shall not lose our identity but reach that stage of communion with the glorified Christ to which God's creative activity in drawing man from the dust of the earth, in making him capable of true dialogue and in giving him the status of sonship with

Christ, is finally directed.

Water and the Holy Spirit:

In the biblical view of creation God, by the power of his spirit, first created order out of the chaos of waters and then drew life from it.

At the time of Noah, water destroyed those who would not honour God; but it became a means of salvation and the way to a new life for those who were willing to honour God. We are not being remiss in looking back to Noah for a deeper understanding of Baptism for St. Peter wrote in his first epistle,

"That ark, . . . in which a few Souls, eight in all, found refuge as they passed through the waves, was a type of the Baptism which saves us now."

(I Peter 3:20)

At the time of Moses, the Israelites were saved by the journey through the waters of the Red Sea; they were given living water to sustain them in the desert and they passed through the waters of the river Jordan to their new life in the promised land.

Naaman, the leper, experienced the saving gift of God by bathing in the waters of the Jordan. By this simple means he was cured of his leprosy.

The prophet, Ezekiel, looking ahead to Messianic times, promised that God would pour out on the world his living water.

"Give Israel, then, this message from the Lord God: . . . I will pour cleansing water over you, to purge you from every stain you bear, purge you from the taint of your idolatry. I will give you a new heart, and breathe a new spirit into you: I will take away from your breasts those hearts that are hard as stone and give you human hearts instead." *(Ezek 36: 25-26)*

The power of water to purify and re-create comes from the spirit of God. This prophecy is fulfilled in the gift of the Spirit and in the exercise of his power in the Sacrament of Baptism.

The Jewish people had their own baptismal rite in which water was a sign of cleansing from sin, of repentance and forgiveness. The last prophet to administer "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin" was St. John the Baptist. His baptism was not yet a christian sacrament; but it contained one element that remained valid. It was a ritual expression of a man's turning away from sin towards God. It still remains a condition of entry into the kingdom of God that we should repent and believe the Gospel.

THE TIME OF FULFILMENT

The Circumcision of Christ:

Any study of the sacraments must carry us back to the life of Christ because we do not come to an understanding of a sacrament until we see it as an act of Christ by which some event in his life becomes effective in our lives.

In his infancy, Christ was taken to the temple to be circumcised, much as a baby would be taken to a church for Baptism today. His circumcision incorporated him publicly and officially into the people of Israel. The fact of God the Son made man being circumcised was a truly remarkable way of teaching that he had come to fulfil the work that God had begun with Abraham. Circumcision was the sign of a covenant between God and Abraham. Christ was the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham, "in you, all the races of the world shall find a blessing." *(Gen. 12:3)* A further promise made to Abraham is fulfilled in the baptized who become his children through their union with Christ, "You shall be the father of a multitude of nations." *(Gen. 17:5)*.

Circumcision of the Heart:

The prophet, Jeremiah, pointed out to the Israelites that circumcision of the body, which was a sign of their covenant with God, had to be accompanied by a heart that welcomed the message of God.

"You must be circumcised afresh, men of Judah. Citizens of Jerusalem, rid yourself of heart's defilement, if you would not see my vengeance burst into unquenchable flame." (*Jer. 4:4*)

Only by fulfilling God's will could Israel be an acceptable people.

The circumcision of Christ, therefore, became effective in the way he carried out the will of God, especially in his passion. By Baptism its fruits are applied to us. St. Paul refers to this matter on six separate occasions in his letters. He indicates to us that Christ has taken away the need for circumcision of the body; but circumcision of the heart, dedication to God, is still required of us.

"Here is . . . no more circumcised and uncircumcised; . . . there is nothing but Christ in any of us. You are God's people holy and well beloved. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience . . . And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord." (*Col 3: 11-17*)

Our commitment to Christ, in virtue of Baptism, is a commitment to the will of God. Our hearts are circumcised and we become the true people of God through devotion to his will.

"There is no virtue either in circumcision or want of it; *it is keeping the commandments of God that signifies.*" (*1 Cor. 7:19*).

The Law of Incarnation:

Christ's circumcision gave an indication of the path he was to follow in working out our salvation. He was by birth a child of Abraham, presumably with the physical and psychological graces and limitations of this subject people. By his circumcision he made his own the religious history of this people. In a word, he undertook to work out our salvation according to the law of incarnation.

This law is perhaps best stated by St. Paul who said of Christ that he became like to us in all things except sin. When Christ was on earth people got to know him by seeing what he did and hearing what he said. However, despite these limitations of his divine power, he had within himself the means by which all men for all time could become children of God with him. The law of incarnation would carry over into the Church to accomplish this. Christ's actions are now continued by sign in the Church, so that, for instance, when a man baptizes it is Christ who baptizes. We must, therefore, see Baptism as a culminating event, intimately associated with the law by which Christ worked out our salvation, in a story that begins with the call of Abraham.

The Baptism of Christ:

Christ's public ministry commenced with his baptism in the Jordan. We might say that by this event he ratifies by an adult commitment the circumcision he had received in infancy. In any event, his baptism inaugurates and clarifies his redemptive activity.

In speaking of Christ's baptism we must ask why he accepted "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin" when he was like us in all things except sin. A possible answer is that he wanted to express concretely the fact that he had entered fully into our sinful situation, although he was personally free from sin, and undertaken to rescue us from our sinful condition. God was pleased with the gesture of his Son and commissioned him for the Work he had come to do: "You are my beloved son: with you I am well pleased". (*Mark 1:11*) So fully had Christ entered into our sinful situation that the Holy Spirit came upon him to strengthen him for the work he had undertaken to do.

Christ's Baptism and Our Own:

Although Christ's baptism was quite different from our own, it anticipates many elements of the sacrament we have. First and foremost we have the presence of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. Then we have the fact that Christ's baptism was a baptism by water and the Holy Spirit; Whose power he received. In addition Christ's baptism was a vocation in the sense that it committed him to the work of God. Later on he grew impatient for the fulfilment of this vocation. "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I constrained until it is accomplished." (*Luke 12:50*) The relevance of this to us is that Christ was baptized into his death; his real baptism was to be a baptism of blood. That is why John pointed him out as the Lamb of God. The salvation of the world was dependent on this commitment to death that Christ freely made. The fruits of this salvation became available to us through baptism; but for them to exercise their full power in us for our salvation and the salvation of the world, we have to identify ourselves with Christ in his dedication to the Father. This was expressed earlier by saying that we must ratify by an adult commitment the gift we have received in infancy. Finally, after Christ had humbled himself by going down into the waters. he was exalted by his Father and the Holy Spirit. The significance of this is that Christ was baptized into glory as well as into death. What was true of Christ becomes true for us. In accepting baptism we take up the cross with Christ (by undertaking to live according to God's will); but we take up the cross in the sure knowledge that Christ has gone before us and won a victory on our behalf.

The Early Public Life:

Christ set out with a will to do his Father's work and preached the gospel in Galilee. At first his teaching was welcomed. People flocked to hear him and to be healed by him. As the number of his miracles increased, enthusiasm for him grew. There was even an attempt to make him a king. But most were mistaken about the kind of kingdom Christ had come to establish and apparently they expected him to restore the political prestige of Israel. The kingdom of which he spoke was neither a territory nor a form of government but his Father's rule in love over the hearts of men. Ultimately he was to establish this kingdom in the world by his loving fidelity to his Father.

Our entry today into the kingdom that Christ established is by Baptism. But the conditions that Christ laid down for membership in his kingdom still apply. We must repent, that is to say we must turn away from sin and turn towards the living God, if we are to ratify our Baptism. Once in the kingdom of God we must live according to the standards that Christ set in his early preaching of the kingdom. It is not sufficient, for instance, that we should experience the compassion of Christ in our own lives. We are also expected to exercise the compassion of Christ because membership in the kingdom is simply incorporation in Christ. It is still a part of the christian ministry that the blind should see, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, the lame walk, the hungry be fed and the poor have the gospel preached to them. The condition for the growth of the kingdom of God in the world began to be clarified right from the beginning of the public ministry by Christ's preaching and by his way of life. It has been beautifully stated in the Constitution on the Church from the Second Vatican Council.

"Just as Christ carried out the work of the redemption in poverty and persecution, so the Church is called to follow the same road that it might communicate the fruits of salvation to men.... Thus, the Church, although it needs human resources to carry out its mission, is not set up to seek earthly glory, but to proclaim, even by its own example, humility and self-sacrifice."

(The Constitution on the Church, Par. 8)

The Church can set the example of humility and self-sacrifice only in so far as individual members of the Church, the baptized, live in imitation of Christ.

The Theme of Conflict:

As time passed, opposition to Christ grew. The further he clarified his own role in the World and the nature of the kingdom he had come to preach the more persistent and hostile the opposition to him. The Pharisees, who were the antithesis of all that he preached and stood for, resolved to hunt him down mercilessly. What ultimately led to the death of Christ was the rejection of his claim to be the Son of God and the rejection of the message of salvation he had come to bring. "This is my beloved Son." God said.

"You are Beelzebub, the prince of devils," said the Pharisees. Eventually they condemned Christ for blasphemy and accused him of "perverting the people". The opposition to Christ culminated in his death on the cross, the baptism he had at one moment feared and at another moment longed for.

There is no doubt that this theme of conflict must be lived out by the christian who by vocation- is a sign of contradiction in the world. In bearing witness by values such as humility, poverty, chastity, obedience, the christian must run in some way counter to those who live by power. wealth, indulgence and self-sufficiency. Within his own self he will experience the tensions that came from trying to balance ordinary care in human affairs with detachment and confidence in God's providence. In a sense our greatest motive for confidence is itself a cause of tension, because the victory that Christ won over sin must be won daily in the life of the christian.

The Hour of Christ:

Christ came into the world with a work to do. He had to preach and establish God's kingdom. During the whole of- his life he gave all his human energy to this work. It was love for God and for his fellow men that prompted him- to do so. Eventually he saw that the fulfilment of the work he came to do would be through his death. According to the pattern of behaviour he had established during his life, he faced death with generous love. He did this, as he tells us himself, so that "the world may know that I love the Father, and that I have done as the Father has commanded me." (*John 14:13*) In his death, therefore. Christ was perfectly faithful to his Father and to the mission he had received. Out of love he was obedient to death. By this obedience mankind was saved.

However, we must understand that Christ died to become the risen saviour. His resurrection followed his death not so much as a reward for faithful service but as something much more intimate. As Our Lord himself pointed out it is more a matter of the grain of wheat dying in order to bring forth fruit. The passion and the resurrection are a single redemptive process by which Christ wins new life for mankind in the gift of the Spirit.

The final act in the passage of Christ to his Father, which is at the one time his glorification and the salvation of men, is his return to his Father's side. At his Father's side his intercession continues forever. We experience this intercession in the gift of the Spirit who makes possible the continuance of Christ's hour in us and through us. Our entrance into this hour is through the sacrament of Baptism.

By Baptism we are drawn into the very life of Christ in such a way that we become "other Christs". The Holy Spirit recreates in all of us the love which motivated Christ. This becomes a source of peace and joy in us; but it also becomes a motive for redemptive action. Paul emphasized this point:

"For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one *has died for all*; therefore all have died. And he died for all, *that those who live might no longer live for themselves* but for him who for their sake died and was raised." (*2 Cor. 5:14-15.*)

Christ's Teaching of Baptism:

To Nicodemus Christ said, "Unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God." (*John 3:5*) These words took on their full meaning in the water and blood that flowed from Christ's side on Calvary. The water was symbolic of the new life won for men by the death of Christ. It became the principal sign of the sacrament of Baptism by which Christ brings new life to men through the power of the Spirit.

It is worth mentioning as an aside that that blood which flowed from the side of Christ was a symbol of his redemptive death. It directs our attention to the Eucharist, the sacrament in which Christ's redemptive work is commemorated and continued. So important is this sacrament that our initiation into the Church, commenced at Baptism, is completed by our full participation in the Eucharist.

Teaching Through Miracles:

St. John's account of the healing of the man born blind narrates how Christ spread clay on the man's eyes and sent him to the pool of Siloam to wash. In the washing his sight was restored. St. John saw in this action an exercise of that same power by which we are illuminated, our eyes are opened, by the waters of Baptism.

The idea of Christ bringing about a transition from darkness (blindness) to light (sight) in us is one that appealed greatly both to St. John and to St. Paul. "The same God who bade light shine out of darkness," wrote St. Paul, "has kindled a light in our hearts." (*2 Cor. 4:6*) One of the names given to Baptism in the early church was "the sacrament of illumination". By this sacrament we are incorporated into Christ who is the light of the world. Christ warned us not to hide the light enkindled in us but to let it shine before men so that they might come to the knowledge of God's love.

The promise of Baptism is to be seen in other miracles of Christ, such as the raising of Lazarus from the dead and the casting out of evil spirits. There is no space to comment on these miracles except perhaps to say that the institution of this sacrament by Christ was something that commenced at his own baptism and continued through his public life until his death on the cross.

The Command to Baptize:

Christ commissioned his apostles to preach and to baptize. "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (*Mark 16:16*)

The apostles accepted Christ's commission and began their work from the day of Pentecost. We may read in the Acts of the Apostles evidence for the tie between preaching, faith, and baptism. What is pre-supposed by this is that a profession of faith is crowned by the sacrament of Baptism.

"For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (*Gal. 3:25-26*)

The faith required for Baptism in the early Church was centred on the risen Christ. It was a response to God in Christ, a response that was invited by the apostolic preaching. It implied a self-gift to Christ so complete that it transformed the entire life of the believer.

"The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."
(*Gal. 2/20*)

It was a life of membership in the body of Christ. The baptized were the new people of God, a people with one God and Father, one body and one spirit, a people with one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

THE PRESENT ERA

We live at present in an era which commenced at Pentecost and which will end at the second coming of Christ. It is an era which has rightly been described as the time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ continues his redemptive mission amongst men through signs. The principal sign through which Christ acts today is the Church and its sacraments.

Currently one often hears the church called a pilgrim Church, *a Church that presses forward amid the persecution of the world and the consolations of God towards the second coming of Christ*. In its journey the Church has to face challenges from within itself and from forces opposed to God in the world; but it enjoys the power of the risen Christ and in the assurance of that power it tries to manifest the mystery of Christ to the world. However, it can do this effectively only in so far as its individual members, accepting their vocation to take up the cross with Christ, present themselves as "a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing

to God." (*Rom. 12:1*)

For an insight into this aspect of the vocation of christians it is worth looking at the dialogue between priest and godparent (and/or parent) in the baptismal ceremony.

Priest: What do you ask of the Church of God?

Godparent: Faith.

Priest: What does faith offer you?

Godparent: Eternal life.

Priest: If then you desire to enter life, keep the commandments. "You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind; and you shall love your neighbour as yourself."

The faith we receive as a gift in Baptism is our means of entry into eternal life on condition that we live by faith. In order to see what it means to live by faith we must understand that faith is both a commitment to Christ and a vocation to charity. Later on we shall see that the man who is committed to Christ must live in Christ. For the moment we will consider faith in so far as it is a vocation to charity.

Although faith offers us eternal life, we cannot expect to be saved unless we persevere in charity. Expressed positively this means that our christian vocation is to love God and to love our fellow men. This is why, as well as receiving the gift of faith in Baptism, we also receive the gift of hope, which enables us to persevere in the Christ life in the face of difficulties, and the gift of charity, which enables us to love God and our fellow men with the love of Christ made available to us through the gift of the Spirit.

A Seal, or Character:

Our love for God will naturally express itself in worship. In Baptism we receive a character, often called a mark or sign, which is God's seal. This character is said to give us a share in the priesthood of Christ. The priesthood that the laity receive in this way differs essentially from the priesthood of an ordained priest; but it is a true priesthood, called by Saint Peter a royal priesthood. The People of God exercise this priesthood by joining in the offering of the Eucharist, in receiving the other sacraments, in prayer, in thanksgiving, in the witness of a life lived for God, in self-denial and in active charity.

God seeks true adorers, people who will worship him in spirit and in truth. The baptized may worship in spirit and in truth by joining wholeheartedly in the perfect act of worship offered to the Father by Christ on Calvary and continued now at his Father's side. The character received at baptism fits us to join in this worship. The spirit in which God is adored by christians is indicated by Saint Paul:

"Those who follow the leading of God's spirit are all God's sons; the spirit you have now received is not, as of old, a spirit of slavery, to govern you by fear: it is the spirit of adoption, which makes us cry out, Abba, Father." (*Rom. 8:14-15*)

To adore God is to acknowledge his fatherhood. We do not do this out of a sense of obligation; we do it spontaneously in recognition of his goodness in adopting us as his sons. What we say to God in worship is, in effect, "Father, your will be done." We do not utter this cry alone. We make it in union with Christ. It is an expression of our will to live for God in the whole of our lives and with the whole of our being. It is a recognition of the fact that we are made for God, baptized into Christ and consecrated by the gift of the spirit.

Sharing

As well as expressing itself in worship our love for God will express itself in our love for our fellow men. Our love for our fellow men, if it is to be more than lip service, must express itself in sharing. First and foremost, we will want to share our most valued gifts, the saving graces we have received and our knowledge of the truth. We know the needs of our fellow men and we know, too, that God wills all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth. What we are slow to admit is that it is really within the power of every christian to bring the knowledge and love of God to other people.

We ought to be grateful, therefore, that the *Constitution on the Church* makes it so clear that, provided our lives are permeated by a genuine Christian spirit, we may in the course of our ordinary daily living, whether at work, or at home or in the company of our friends, help to bring men to God. In regard to family life the Constitution says,

"The christian family proclaims the present virtues of the kingdom of God and hope in the blessed life to come. Thus, by its example and witness it accuses the world of sin and enlightens those who seek the truth. Consequently, even when preoccupied with temporal matters, the laity can and should perform a work of great value for the evangelization of the world." (*Par. 35.*)

Looked at negatively Baptism is the sacrament of the washing away of original sin. Looked at positively it is the sacrament of our entry into the kingdom of God, the sacrament which confers on us an apostolic responsibility for our fellow men and the grace to discharge that responsibility.

Growth Through Charity:

It is not sufficient that we should be willing to share our spiritual resources. When Saint John the Baptist was preparing men for the coming of the kingdom of God he taught that the man who had two coats ought to share with the man who had none. The willingness to share material resources remains a basic condition for the growth of the kingdom of God in the world and for our own growth within that kingdom. In regard to the latter point it is not sufficient to understand that our faith is a vocation to charity. It is also necessary to understand that our faith grows through the exercise of charity.

When we speak about sharing our material resources we are not thinking primarily of sharing our superfluous possessions, although in the present state of the world neither individuals nor nations can afford to overlook this point. We are speaking more of the necessity of realizing that the service of others is at the heart of Christ's saving work. His compassion for others can live on in the world only through the practical charity of individual christians. Many people, doctors, teachers, public servants, tradesmen, nurses, shop assistants, legal men, politicians, union officials, entertainers, housewives, farmers, factory workers, the list is almost endless, lead lives of valued service. What Baptism does is to transform this service into positive redemptive activity. Christianity does not withdraw men from the world. It gives point and purpose to their involvement in the world.

Paul on Baptism:

In Paul's writings specific references to the sacrament of Baptism and its consequences for daily living are numerous. Perhaps his most central thought is that we are caught up by Baptism into the very life of Christ.

In writing of this favourite theme Paul sees Baptism as a great deal more than the basis of a relationship of sonship between God and the individual christian. He is more truly personal in his writing. He stresses the fact that we are all baptized in the one body of Christ. In this body each of us has his individual role to fulfil: but together we constitute a community that is animated so thoroughly by the spirit of Christ that it can be regarded as a single organism, the body of Christ. Those who are members of this body are empowered to worship in the spirit of Christ and to serve with the generosity of Christ.

These realities are caught up in a single phrase that Saint Paul used more than two hundred times in his writings. He says that the baptized *live in Christ*. Although the phrase is an elusive one, we can be sure that it embraces at least the following truths:

Life in Christ is a sharing in Christ's own life through the gift of grace.

Life in Christ is membership in the Church which is his body.

Life in Christ makes possible the continuance of Christ's acts in the world.

Life in Christ contains the promise of a yet more perfect union with the glorified Christ after death.

The person who is aware of being baptized into the life of Christ in this way will try to live according to certain standards:

He will try at all times to carry out the will of the Father in imitation of Christ.

He will try to honour God by prayer in union with Christ.

He will try to serve others with something of Christ's generosity.

He will try to avoid conduct unworthy of his status as an adopted son of God - impurity, dishonesty, gluttony and all forms of selfishness and indulgence.

He will try to cultivate what Saint Paul called the fruits of the Spirit of Christ - peace, patience, forgiveness, justice, mercy, kindness.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The Second Coming of Christ:

God's plan for the world will be completed at the second coming of Christ when the Son hands the kingdom of the redeemed over to his Father. Then for the first time we shall understand the wisdom of God's creation and the grandeur of his love for the world. We shall enter into a fullness of life quite beyond our present understanding.

"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man to know what things God has planned for those who love him." (*1 Cor. 2:9*)

We have seen that Baptism equips us to restore all things in Christ. At the end of the world, when our task is complete, we who have been one with Christ here on earth shall be one with him in the fullness of glory. Our bodies, already temples of the Holy Spirit, shall then rise glorious and immortal. We shall experience in God our full maturity as persons made for God. We shall enter into the perfect freedom of sons of God. Meanwhile we are committed to a life of charity such as will show the rest of creation that the Christian community is an anticipation of the unity of mind and heart that the blessed enjoy before God.

The Perfection of Adoration:

Although our present worship is a true sharing in the worship offered by Christ to the Father, it is as yet an imperfect thing. It will find its perfection in the liturgy of the heavenly court. The prospect of joining in the perfect adoration of Christ, of the angels and of the saints in the court of heaven is not one with an immediate appeal. This is surely because we fail to realize that we shall then be in the presence of the all holy God and see him face to face. The vision shall be so complete and shall delight us so fully that we will wish nothing other than to join in the hymn of praise that is at the same time our happiness. We may possibly have experienced some anticipation of this in those fleeting moments of worship either in private prayer or in ceremony when the burdens of daily living slip temporarily from us and we seem lost in the timelessness of God.

The Place of the Religious Community:

All are called by Baptism to lead a life of poverty, chastity and obedience fitted to their state in life. But some members of the Church have answered a vocation to the religious life and undertaken by vow to live by poverty, chastity and obedience as a way of life. Such communities would seem to play an important

place in the life of the church because they anticipate in a unique way the life that awaits the faithful servant of God in eternity. When these communities are imbued with a deeply christian and therefore apostolic spirit they make the final hopes of all the baptized seem more attainable and thus encourage the pilgrim Church on its way to God.

Anticipations:

By Baptism we enter into a life of grace. Grace is a freely given gift of God that makes it possible for us to live in union with God. By grace we become sons of the Father, brothers of Christ and friends of the Holy Spirit. Provided we are faithful in these relationships they shall never be taken away from us. They are an anticipation of and a preparation for the more perfect union with God that will be our heaven.

The life of grace that we now live has its greatest moment in the celebration of the Eucharist. We are never so truly the People of God as when we assemble around the altar to offer ourselves with Christ to God. The sense of community that we ought to experience there, is an anticipation of the heavenly community, as we have already seen. But in addition the Eucharist is food for eternal life.

"He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life everlasting and I will raise him up on the last day."
(John 6:55)

Not the least of the privileges of the baptized is the right to the nourishment provided by the body of Christ.

However, it should be understood clearly by all the baptized that anticipations of this kind simply lose their meaning unless we live uprightly and are zealous for good works. Paul reminds us of this with his usual insight into the consequences for daily living of the gifts we have received,

"For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good works."
(Titus 2: 11-14)

SUMMARY

Baptism is a new creation. By it there came into being a new kind of man, one who had not existed before. Christ, the first-born of this new creation, received his baptism first in the river Jordan and finally on Calvary. When he rose to new life on Easter Sunday the whole of mankind rose to new life with him. We begin to live this new life when we are reborn of water and the creative Spirit through Baptism.

By this sacrament, too, a new type of community comes into being. This community, which we call the Church, derives its life from Christ and continues the presence of Christ in the world, being itself the Mystical Body of Christ.

The baptized are expected to live the lives of sons of God, following the pattern established by Christ in his life and teaching. They receive the mission and grace of worshipping the Father in union with the Son, of bringing men to the knowledge and love of God, and of establishing God's kingdom in the world by lives of generous service. The challenge facing the baptized person is to die daily to sin in himself and to work consciously towards christian maturity.

Already the baptized may live a life of intimate union with God; but the life they now possess is itself directed towards a completeness that will consist in sharing fully in the happiness of the glorified Christ.

