

Circumcision Made Without Hands

What We Found

- In the covenant with Abraham, God binds promises to a God-chosen sign in the flesh: for the covenant's newborn sons, given at eight days old, received as pure gift before any choice or understanding (the grown men of Abraham's household received it too, the day it was given: Genesis 17:23–27).
- The Old Testament itself promised a greater circumcision, performed by God on the heart, so that we would love him (Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:28–29 agrees).
- St. Paul names the fulfillment: in Baptism we received *a circumcision made without hands... the circumcision of Christ*, stripping off the whole old self, buried and raised with him (Colossians 2:11–12).
- In Colossians 2, *without hands* marks the work as God's rather than man's: at the font, human hands pour or immerse, and God's hands act.
- The Lord himself received the old sign at eight days old (Luke 2:21), and the Church reads his circumcision as prefiguring that *circumcision of Christ* which is Baptism (CCC 527).
- Real circumcision was always aimed at the heart (Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:28–29).

Voices of the Church

St. Justin Martyr • *Dialogue with Trypho*

St. Justin, whom the group met at the flood, teaches in substance that Christians have received the true, spiritual circumcision promised by the prophets, and that we receive it through Baptism: the sign given to Abraham has found the reality it always pointed toward, and it is now open to every nation.

St. John Chrysostom • *Homilies on Colossians*

St. John Chrysostom, preaching through Colossians in the fourth century, teaches in substance that Paul deliberately calls Baptism the Christian's circumcision: performed not by human hands but by the Spirit, and removing not a small piece of the body but the whole *body of flesh*, the old sinful self, stripped off and buried in the water.

St. Thomas Aquinas • *Summa Theologiae III, q. 70*

St. Thomas, treating circumcision directly, teaches in substance that circumcision was the figure and preparation of Baptism: a true covenant sign professing faith in the Christ who was to come, while Baptism is the sacrament of the Christ who has come. What the old sign promised from a distance, the new sacrament confers in fullness.

Live It This Week

- Pray one line each morning this week: *Lord, circumcise my heart; cut away what keeps me from loving you.*
- If you were baptized as an infant, thank (in person, by call, or in prayer if they have died) the people who carried you to the font.
- Read Colossians 2:6–15 once, alone, and underline every verb whose subject is God, not you.

Memory Verse

and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Colossians 2:12 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: Read Joshua 3–4: Israel finally enters the promised land, and notice what leads them into the river and what the water does.

Catechism references: 527, 1150