

Session 3 Take-Home: Born of Water and the Spirit

What We Found

The water and spirit God promised through Ezekiel ("I will sprinkle clean water upon you... a new spirit I will put within you," Ezek 36:25-26) are delivered by Jesus in Baptism: "unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (Jn 3:5). The promise made through a prophet is kept in a sacrament.

The New Testament speaks of Baptism as the moment God applies the rescue to a person, not a symbol of a rescue that happened elsewhere: "be baptized... **for the forgiveness of your sins**" (Acts 2:38); "be baptized, and **wash away your sins**" (Acts 22:16); buried with Christ and raised to newness of life (Rom 6:3-4); "put on Christ" (Gal 3:27); "the washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5); and Peter's astonishing sentence about the flood's fulfillment: "Baptism... **now saves you**," immediately guarded from magic: "not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 3:20-21). Truly effective, never mechanical.

Paul calls Baptism the circumcision "made without hands" (Col 2:11-12), and God gave that older covenant sign to infants on the eighth day (Gen 17:12). Because Baptism is God's gift to the helpless and not our achievement, an infant with empty hands is, we suggested, the clearest picture of grace there is; the Catechism teaches that infants need the new birth and that Baptism's grace is entirely gratuitous (CCC 1250). And the good thief fits in one Catechism sentence: "God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments" (CCC 1257).

One more Old Testament shadow worth reading at home: Naaman the Syrian, healed of leprosy by washing in the Jordan, "his flesh... restored like the flesh of a little child" (2 Kings 5:1-14). Restored like a child, in the river where John would one day baptize.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Justin Martyr

First Apology, ch. 61 (c. 155)

Explaining Christian practice to the Roman emperor, St. Justin describes converts "born again" through washing in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, a washing the Church calls *illumination*. Within living memory of the apostles' students, Baptism is new birth and light, not a symbol.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · St. Gregory of Nazianzus

Oration 40, On Holy Baptism (381)

St. Gregory piles up Baptism's names in wonder: gift, grace, anointing, illumination, the garment of immortality, the bath of rebirth, the seal. It is called gift, he explains in substance, because it is given to those who bring nothing. The Catechism quotes this passage in its own teaching (CCC 1216).

VOICE OF THE CHURCH · Tertullian

On Baptism, ch. 1 (c. 200)

The early Christian writer Tertullian: "we, little fishes, after the example of our *ΙΧΘΥΣ* Jesus Christ, are born in water." *Ichthys*, fish, was an early acrostic: Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior. Christians are creatures who come to life in water.

Live It This Week

Find the date. Call your parents or your parish and find the date of your Baptism. Write it in your Bible next to Romans 6:4, and consider marking it every year like the birthday it is.

Use the water. Each time you bless yourself with holy water entering a church this week, do it slowly, as a deliberate renewal of your Baptism.

Renew the promises. One evening this week, pray the baptismal promises: reject sin, profess the Creed, and thank God for the day he made you his own.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"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."

Romans 6:4 (RSV2CE)

Before next session: read Romans 3:21-31, and circle the word "justified" every time it appears.

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 1213, 1216, 1250, 1257, 1263-1266, 1992