

Synod Theme: The Sacrament of Baptism - Romans 6:3

Paul in his epistle to the Romans presents the facts of the gospel and declares his allegiance to it (Romans 1:3, 16 & 17). He continues by building an airtight case for the lostness of mankind and the necessity for God's intervention (Romans 1:18 – 3: 20).

Then Paul presents the Good News that salvation is available to all regardless of a person's identity, sin, or heritage. We are saved by grace (i.e. unearned, undeserved favour from God) through faith (complete trust) in Christ and His finished work. Through Christ we can stand before God justified 'not guilty' (Romans 3:21 – 5:21). With this foundation, Paul moves directly into a discussion of the freedom that comes from being saved (a) freedom from the power of sin, (Romans 6:1 – 23), (b) freedom from the dominion of the law (Romans 7:1 – 25), and (c) freedom to become like Christ and discover God's limitless love (Romans 8:1 – 38). We shall discuss this fully at the end of the presentation.

The above call for our attention as we journey through the theme of our Synod which is '***The Sacrament of Baptism***'.

In the Church Catechism we have a question "How many sacraments hath Christ ordained in His Church? Answer: Two only as generally necessary to salvation that is to say, Baptism, and the Supper of the Lord. Another question that follows is what meanest thou by this word Sacrament? Answer; It means an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given to us, ordained by Christ Himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof.

It is necessary for us to look at the words Sacraments in order to understand our Synod Theme: What is Sacraments? The term although applied by common consent to certain institutions of the New Testament, the word 'Sacrament' (Latin – Sacramentum) is not a scriptural one. In classical Latin, sacramentum (from secreta to consecrate) is used especially in two

senses. (a) passively, as a legal term, to denote a sum of money deposited by the parties to a suit, which was forfeited by the loser and appropriated to sacred uses; (b) actively, as a military term, to denote the oath taken by newly enlisted soldiers.

When it came to be applied to Christian usage, the word retained the suggestions of both of those earlier employments. A sacrament was something set apart for sacred purposes; it was also in certain cases of the nature of a vow of self consecration, resembling the oath of the Roman soldier (cf Tertullian. We were called to the warfare of the Living God in our very response to the sacramental works). But the application and history of the word in the Christian Church were determined chiefly by the fact that in the Old Latin and Vulgate it was repeatedly employed (mysterious, however being employed more frequently) to render the Greek *mysterion* i.e. a mystery. Thus, St. Paul says 'This mystery is great' (Ephesians 5:32).

This identification of the idea of a sacrament with that of a mystery was carried still further by Tertullian and was greatly fostered by the fact that about this time a tendency was rapidly growing in the church to an assimilation of Christian worship to the mystery worship of the Grace –Tertullian of 2nd century and beginning of 3rd century) is the first writer to apply the name 'sacrament' to Baptism, the Eucharist and other rites of the Christian Church.

When Pliny (c A.D.112) in his account of the worship of the Christians of Bithynia describes them at their morning meetings as 'binding themselves by a sacramentum to commit no kind of crime, it has been suggested by some that he was using the word in the Christian sense and was referring either to baptismal vow or to participation in the Eucharist. The fact however, that we do not find such a use of the word, even in Christian-writers, for nearly a century afterwards makes this extremely unlikely, and the probability is that Pliny intended it in the old Roman sense of an oath or solemn obligation.

According to the Roman view, sacraments are efficacious *ex opere operato* i.e. by a power inherent in themselves as outward acts. The reformed doctrine, on the other hand maintains that though they are Divinely appointed channels of the heavenly grace, their benefits to the recipient are contingent upon the exercise of faith in Christ Himself.

History of the Sacrament – As our Lord selected two of the commonest articles of daily food, *via.*, bread and wine, to be the elements through which Divine grace was to be conveyed in Holy communion, so He chose the universal element of water as the medium of the grace conveyed in Holy Baptism. The washing of the body with water to symbolize the purification of the soul from sin, and as a preparation for prayer, was a rite observed in most ancient religions. The Egyptian priests bathed twice in the day and twice in the night. So the Greeks and Romans bathed before sacrifice and prayer – more particularly after some pollution, as the stain of blood. The Law of Moses prescribed washings in a great variety of cases. It would appear that the Jews purified themselves before the great festivals, and it has been conjectured that the pool of Bethesda was set apart for this purpose. The spiritual significance of these lustrations of the Law is clearly recognized in such passages as Ps. Li. 2 (A.V.), ‘Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.’ Maimonides, a Jewish writer, says, ‘Israel was admitted into covenant by three things, viz, by (i) circumcision, (ii) baptism, and (iii) sacrifice. Circumcision was in Egypt, as it is said, “None uncircumcised shall eat of the Passover.” Baptism was in the wilderness, before the giving of the Law, as it is said, “Thou shalt sanctify them to-day and to-morrow, and let them wash their garments.” He adds, ‘And so in after times, when a heathen will enter into the covenant [i.e., become a proselyte], and be gathered and joined under the wings of the Divine Majesty, and take upon him the yoke of the Law, circumcision and baptism and a free-will offering are required. A stranger that is circumcised and not baptized, or that is baptized and is not circumcised, is not a proselyte till he be both circumcised and baptized.’ It was required that witnesses should be present on these occasions. Maimonides says, ‘It is necessary that he be baptized before a triumvirate,

or before a consistory of three. If a man comes and says, "I was a proselyte in such a consistory, and they baptized me," he is not to be trusted to come into the congregation till he brings witness.' The baptism of St. John the Baptist is spoken of as a 'baptism of repentance for the remission of sins,' and would appear 'to have been a kind of transition from the Jewish baptism to the Christian It was accompanied with confession (St. Matt. lii. 6) ; it was a call to repentance ; it conveyed a promise of pardon; and the whole was knit up with faith in Him that should come after, even Christ Jesus (Acts xix. 4), ' --- (Bishop Harold Browne, Smith's Bible Dictionary, Orig. Ed.).

BAPTISM – This term, which designates a NT rite, is confined to the vocabulary of the NT. It does not occur in the LXX, neither is the verb with which it is connected ever used of an initiatory ceremony. This verb is a derivative from one which means 'to dip' (Jn 13²⁵, Rev.19¹³), but itself has a wider meaning, 'to wash' whether the whole or part of the body, whether by immersion or by the pouring of water (Mk7⁴, Lk 11³⁸). The substantive is used (a) of Jewish ceremonial washings (mk 74, He 910); (b) in a metaphorical sense (Mk 10²⁸, Lk 12⁵⁰; cf, 'plunged in calamity'); and (c) most commonly in the technical sense of a religious ceremony of initiation.

The earliest use of the word 'baptism' to describe a religious and not merely ceremonial observance is in connexion with the preaching of John the Baptist, and the title which is given to him is probably an indication of the novelty of his procedure (Mt 3¹, Mk 8²⁸, Lk 7²⁰, cf. Mk 6¹⁴⁻²⁴). He 'preached the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins' (Mk 1⁴, i.e. the result of his preaching was to induce men to seek baptism as an outward sign and pledge of inward repentance on their part, and of their forgiveness on the part of God. 'Baptism is related to repentance as the outward act in which the inward change finds expression. It has been disputed whether the practice of baptizing proselytes on their reception into the Jewish community was already established in the 1st cent.; probably it was. But in any case the significance of their baptism was that of ceremonial cleansing; John employed it as a symbol and a seal of

moral purification. But, according to the Gospel record, John recognized the incomplete and provisional character of the baptism administered by him: 'I indeed have baptized you with water; but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost' (Mk 1⁸).

This rite would seem to have been continued for a time by the disciples of our Lord (St. John iii. 26; iv. 2). The baptism instituted by Christ was a baptism 'with the Holy Ghost and with fire,' not merely a symbolical act, but a means whereby the gift of the Holy Ghost is communicated and the guilt of sin purged away. Its institution is recorded in the command given to His disciples; 'Go ye, therefore, and teach * all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost' (St. Matt. xxviii. 19). The Church Fathers delighted in discovering in the Old Testament history typical anticipations of holy Baptism, e.g., the moving of the Holy Spirit on the face of the waters (Gen. i. 2); the Deluge, in which, while a sinful world was destroyed, the faithful were saved (Cf. 1 St. Pet. lii. 20, 21); the passage of the Red Sea, by which, while Pharaoh and his hosts were destroyed, the Israelites were saved (1 Cor. X. 1, 2); the cleansing of Naaman by washing in the Jordan, etc.

Jesus Himself accepted baptism at the hands of John (Mk 1²), overcoming the reluctance of the Baptist with a word of authority. That Jesus Himself baptized is nowhere suggested in the Synoptic Gospels, and is expressly denied in the Fourth Gospel (Jn 4²); but His disciples baptized, and it must have been with His authority, equivalent to baptism by Himself, and involving admission to the society of His disciples. On the other hand His instructions to the Twelve and to the Seventy contain no command to baptize. Christian baptism was to be baptism 'with the Spirit, and Spirit was not yet given' (Jn 7³⁸). It is recorded in Acts (1⁵) that the Risen Lord foretold that this promised baptism would be received after His departure, 'not many days hence.'

Christian baptism, although it finds a formal analogy in the baptism of John, which in its turn represents a spiritualizing of ancient Jewish ideas

of lustration, appears as in its essential character a new thing after the descent of the Holy Spirit. It is a phenomenon 'entirely unique, and in its inmost nature without any analogy, because it rises as an original fact from the soil of the Christian religion of revelation' (von Dobschitz). It has been customary to trace the institution of the practice to the words of Christ record in Mt 28¹⁹. But the authenticity of this passage has been challenged on historical as well as on textual grounds. It must be acknowledged that the formula of the threefold name, which is here enjoined, does not appear to have been employed by the primitive Church, which, so far as our information goes, baptized 'in' or 'into the name of Jesus' (or 'Jesus Christ' or 'the Lord Jesus'; Ac 2⁵⁸ 8¹⁵ 10⁴⁸ 19⁵, cf., 1 Co 1¹³ 1⁵), without reference to the Father or the Spirit. The difficulty hence arising may be met by assuming (a) that Baptism in the name of Jesus was equivalent to Baptism in the name of the Trinity; or (b) that the shorter phrase does not represent the formula used by the baptizer (which may have been the fuller one), but the profession made by the baptized, and the essential fact that he became a Christian-one of Christ's acknowledged followers. But it is better to infer the authority of Christ for the practice from the prompt and universal adoption of it by the Apostles and the infant church, to which the opening chapters of Acts bear witness; and from the significance attached to the rite in the Epistles, and especially in those of St. Paul.

In the Acts of the Apostles we read how our Lord's command was carried out. When the conscience-stung multitude exclaimed on the Day of Pentecost, 'What shall we do!' St. Peter replied, 'Repent ye, and be baptized, every one of you' (Acts ii. 38, R.V.). When the Samaritans 'believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women' (Acts viii. 12). Other instances of baptism are afforded in the cases of the Ethiopian eunuch, Saul, Cornelius and his household, Lydia and her house-hold, the Philippian gaoler 'and all his.' St. Paul mentions Crispus and Gaius, and 'the household of Stephanas,' as persons whom he had himself baptized (1 Cor. i. 14 – 16). The preaching of St. Paul, no less than that of St. Peter, led to the profession of faith through baptism, though, the Apostle

seems as a rule to have left the actual administration to others (1 Co 11⁴⁻¹⁷); 'for Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel'.

That baptism was the normal, and probably the indispensable condition of being recognized as a member of the Christian community appears from allusions in the Epistles (1 Co 12¹⁵, Gal 3²⁷), and abundantly from the evidence in Acts. The first preaching of the Spirit-filled Apostles on the day of Pentecost led to many being 'pricked in their heart'; and in answer to their inquiry addressed to 'Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Peter said unto them; 'Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ',

'Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said to them, "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...'(Ac 2^{37; 38}),

'They then that received his word were baptized' to the number of about three thousand souls.' At Samaria, 'when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women' (8¹²), - the earliest expresses statement that women were admitted to the rite. In this case the gift of the Spirit did not follow until Peter and John had come down from Jerusalem, and 'prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost.' 'Then they laid their hands upon them, and they received the Holy Ghost' (8¹⁷). Saul was baptized by Ananias (9¹⁷) in accordance with instructions recorded by himself (22¹⁵), and that he might be filled with the Holy Ghost.' In these cases the gift followed upon baptism, with or without the laying-on of hands. In the case of Cornelius and his friends, the gift followed immediately upon the preaching of the word by Peter, and presumably its reception in the heart of those who heard; and it was after that that the

Apostle 'commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord' (10⁴⁸). It was on the ground of this previous communication of the Holy Spirit that Peter subsequently justified his action in admitting these persons to baptism (11¹⁵⁻¹⁸).

There can be little doubt that the Sacrament was ordinarily administered by immersion, but it is unreasonable to hold that the validity of the Sacrament depends on total immersion. The mode of administration doubtless varied with the circumstances of health, the presence or absence of a copious supply of water, with climate, time, place, and age. St. Paul speaks of being 'buried in baptism, and it is most natural to explain the metaphor as referring to immersion in the waters of baptism. The Didache (A.D. 80-100; see p.7) distinctly allows of affusion where there is no facility for immersion. After enjoining the * 'Teach,' etc. Rather, 'Make disciples of all nations by baptizing them (Ma.....) use of 'living,' i.e, running, water, it says; 'But if thou hast not living water, then baptize in other water; and if thou art not able in cold, then in warm. But if thou hast neither, then pour water on the head thrice, in the Name the Holy Trinity, ' etc. Tertullian (died A.D. 220) says, 'Ter mergitamus' ('We are thrice dipped'). Affusion took the place of immersion because of the greater convenience and its freedom from danger. The Church of Rome allows immersion, affusion, or sprinkling. The Church of England now here sanctions or even mentions sprinkling. St. Cyprian tells us that the water was first cleansed and sanctified by the priest. St. Cyril tells us that the persons to be baptized, on entering the outer hall of the baptistry, stretched forth their arms, and said, 'I renounce thee, Satan, and all thy works, and all thy pomp, and all thy service. Then they declared their belief in the Holy Trinity and in one baptism of repentance.' On entering the inner chamber, they put off their old garments, as an image of their putting off the old man, and were anointed with oil. They were next led to the 'holy pool,' and each was asked whether he believed in the Holy Trinity. They then descended three times into the water, and three times ascended out of it. Unction was administered to symbolize the gift of the Holy Spirit. At a very early period white garments were worn by the newly-baptized within the Octave of their baptism. At a later period the

ceremonies that accompanied Holy Baptism were greatly multiplied. Thus, towards the close of the sixth century the Bishop, at the benediction of the font, divided the waters with his hand in the form of a cross, held a taper in the water, breathed thrice on the water, and poured consecrated oil on the water – also in the form of a cross. After leaving the font, the newly baptized were anointed with the chrism and confirmed, the service ending with Holy Communion.

The mediaeval office for Holy Baptism was still longer. Some of its distinctive features were the following: Salt was placed in the mouth of the child, the priest saying, 'N., Receive the salt of wisdom, that God may be gracious unto thee unto life everlasting. Amen.' The devil was adjured to come out of the child. The ears and nostrils of the child were touched with saliva. All this took place in that part of the service which belonged to the Admission of a catechumen. The Benediction of the Font was much the same as in the sixth century. Previous to actual baptism, the child was anointed on the breast and between the shoulders, and was invested with a chrisom with the words, 'N., Receive a white and spotless vesture, which thou shalt bear before the Judgment-Seat of our Lord Jesus Christ, that thou mayest have eternal life, and live for ever and ever, Amen.' A lighted taper was also placed in the hands of the child, with the words, 'N., Receive a burning light that cannot be taken out of thy hand; guard thy baptism; keep the commandments; that when the Lord shall come to the wedding, thou mayest be able to meet Him in company with His saints in the heavenly bridechamber; that thou mayest have eternal life, and live for ever and ever. Amen.' The form of exorcism, the anointing, the chrisom, and the trine immersion, were retained in the First Prayer-Book of Edward VI. These were all omitted in the Prayer-Book of 1552. (See pp. 37, 42.)

The conditions antecedent to baptism are plainly set forth in Acts, viz. repentance and profession of faith in Jesus as Messiah or as 'the Lord, following on the preaching of the word. The method of administration was baptizing with water in or into the name of Jesus. Immersion may have been employed when the presence of sufficient water made it

convenient; but there is nothing to show that affusion or sprinkling was not regarded as equally valid. That baptism was 'in the name of Jesus' signifies that it took place for the purpose of sealing the new relationship of belonging to, being committed to, His Personality. The blessing attached to the rite is commonly exhibited as the gift of the Holy Spirit; the due fulfillment of the condition of baptism involved ipso facto the due fulfillment of the condition of receiving the Spirit. In the Epistles, the normal consequence of Christian baptism, is analyzed into its various elements. These are in the main three: (a) the 'remission of sins' (Ac 2³³, 1 Cor. 6¹¹; cf. Heb. 10²², 1 Pet. 3²¹). (b) In baptism the believer was to realize most vividly the total breach with his old life involved in his new attitude to God through Christ, a breach comparable only with that effected by death (Ro 6²⁻⁷, Col 2¹²); he was to realize also that the consequences of this fellowship with Christ were not only death to sin, but a new life in righteousness as real as that which followed on resurrection (Ro 6⁴). (c) Baptism conferred incorporation in the one body of Christ (1 Co 12¹³), and was thus adapted to serve as a symbol of the true unity of Christians (Eph 4⁵). The body with which the believer is thus incorporated is conceived of sometimes as the corporate community of Christians, sometimes as the Personality of Christ; 'for as many of you as were baptized into Christ, did put on Christ' (Gal 3²⁷).

Conversely, as with the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, all the elements both of qualification and of experience are sometimes summed up in a pregnant phrase and without regard to the order in which they emerge. Eph 5²⁵ may find its best interpretation through comparison with Jn 15² (cf. 17¹⁷), i.e. as referring to the continuous cleansing of the Church by the word; but if the reference is to baptism, then the phrase 'by the word' probably alludes to the profession of faith by the baptized, whether it took the form of 'Jesus is Lord' (Ro 4¹⁰; cf. 1 Co 12³), or whether it expressed the content of the faith more fully. In Tit 3⁵, while baptism is the instrument by which salvation is realized, 'regeneration' and 'renewal' are both displayed as the work of the Holy Spirit. And here the Apostles interpretation of the rite touches the anticipation of it in our Lord's words recorded in Jn 3⁵. Faith

wrought by the Spirit and faith professed by the believer are alike necessary to entrance into the Kingdom of salvation (cf, Ro 10⁹ 10).

In 1 Co 15²⁹ Paul refers to the practice of persons allowing themselves to be **baptized on behalf of the dead**. Such a practice appears to have had analogies in the Greek mysteries, from which it may have crept into the Christian Church. As such it may be regarded as 'a purely magical, and wholly superstitious, vicarious reception of the sacrament.' Of such a practice the Apostle expresses no approval, but 'simply meets his opponents with their own weapons without putting their validity to the proof' (Rentdorff).

Infant Baptism. It is possible that children were included in the 'households' who are spoken of in the Holy Scriptures as having been baptized, but we need no express injunction to justify the primitive practice of baptizing infants. The practice commends itself, and is supported by the oldest tradition, * Origen, who wrote in the third century, says; 'Ecclesia ab apostolic traditionem suscepit etiam parvulis baptismum dari' ('the Church received the tradition from the Apostles, that to infants also should baptism be administered'). The Jewish children were admitted to the covenant of Abraham at the age of eight days. Why should not our children be admitted into baptism. * Ireneus (A.D 167) says; 'Christ came to save all persons by Himself; all, I mean, who by Him are regenerated unto God – *infants and little ones*, and children, and youths, and elders.' Tertullian, who wrote about A.D 200, was in favour of delaying baptism, but his language clearly implies that infant baptism was the custom of the time. Cyprian (A.D. 200) gives the decision of a council at Carthage on the question whether, in case of infants, whereas you judge that they must not be baptized within two or three days after they are born and that the law of circumcision is to be observed, so that none shall be baptized and sanctified before the eighth day after birth, we were all, in assembly, of the opposite opinion.' Gregory of Nazianzus (A.D. 360) was in favour, except when necessary required otherwise, of postponing baptism until children were three years of age or thereabouts 'when they are capable to hear and answer some of the holy words,' St. Chrysostom (A.D. 380) says 'for

this cause we baptize infants also, though they are not defiled with (actual) sin that there may be superadded to them saintship, righteousness, adoption, inheritance, a brotherhood with Christ, and being made members of Him.' The foregoing extracts are selected from a valuable catena of quotations in Dean Boyd's *Baptism and Baptismal Regeneration.*'

Similarly, infancy was no bar to the admission of heathen children to the covenant. Lightfoot says that one reason why no mention of the baptizing of infants is made in the New Testament is that 'there needed no such mention, baptizing of infants having been as ordinarily used in the Church of the Jews as ever it hath been in the Christian Church' ('Harmony of the New Testament, 'St Luke iii.). Elsewhere he says; 'In the Taimud' they have these words, "Rabbi Hons saith, A little one they baptize by the appointment of the consistory.' The Hebrew gloss upon that plea saith, "If he have not a father, and his mother bring him to be proselyte, they baptize him; because there be no proselyte without circumcision and baptism.' And Maimonides, in the treatise Avadim, hath this saying, 'An Israelite that takes a little heathen child, or that finds a heathen infant, and baptizeth him for a proselyte, behold, he is a proselyte" ('Harm N.T., ' in St. John the Christian covenant at an equally early age! What more natural than to take the earliest opportunity of giving back to God the children whom He has given to us! Young as they are, they need Divine grace; they are capable of receiving a Divine blessing, and they are invited to receive it.

The NT contains no explicit reference to the baptism of infants or young children; but it does not follow that the Church of the 2nd cent. adopted an unauthorized innovation when it carried out the practice of infant baptism. There are good reasons for the silence of Scripture on the subject. The governing principle of St. Luke as the historians of the primitive Church is to narrate the advance of the Kingdom through the missionary preaching of the Apostles, and the conversion of adult men and women. The letters of the Apostles were similarly governed by the immediate occasion and

purpose of their writing. We have neither a complete history, nor a complete account of the organization, of the primitive Church. But of one thing we may be sure; had the acceptance of Christianity involved anything so startling to the Jewish or the Gentile mind as a distinction between the religious standing of the father of a family and his children, the historian would have recorded it, or the Apostles would have found themselves called to explain and defend it. For such a distinction would have been in direct contradiction to the most deeply rooted convictions of Jew and of Gentile alike. From the time of Abraham onwards the Jew had felt it a solemn religious obligation to claim for his sons from their earliest infancy the same covenant relation with God as he himself stood in. There was sufficient parallelism between baptism and circumcision (cf Col 2¹¹) for the Jewish-Christian father to expect the baptism of his children to follow his own as a matter of course. The Apostle assumes as a fact beyond dispute that the children of believers are 'holy' (1 Co 7¹⁴), i.e. under the covenant with God, on the ground of their father's faith. And among Gentile converts a somewhat different but equally authoritative principle that of *patria potestas* would have the same result. In a home organized on this principle, which prevailed throughout the Roman Empire, it would be a thing inconceivable that the children could be severed from the father in their religious rights and duties, in the standing conferred by baptism. Thus, it is because, to the mind of Jew and Gentile alike, the baptism of infants and children yet unable to supply the conditions for themselves was so natural, that St. Luke records so simply that when Lydia believed, she was baptized with her household'; when the Philippians jailor believed, he was baptized, and all those belonging to him. If there were children in these households, these children were baptized on the ground of the faith of their parents; if there were no children, then the principle took a still wider extension, which includes children; for it was the servants or slaves of the household who were 'added to the Church' by baptism on the ground of their master's faith.

Baptism was a ceremony of initiation by which the baptized not only were admitted members of the visible society of the Disciples of Christ, but also

received the solemn attestation of the consequences of their faith. Hence, there are three parties to it. The part of the baptized is mainly his profession of faith in Christ, his confession 'with his heart' that he is the Lord's. The second is the Christian community or Church (rather than the person who administers baptism, and who studiously keeps in the background). Their part is to hear the profession and to grant the human attestation. The third is the Head of the Church Himself, by whose authority the rite is practiced, and who gives the inward attestation, as the experience of being baptized opens in the believing soul new avenues for the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

Proper Place for Baptism - In the apostolic age, as we may see from the Acts of the Apostles, converts were baptized in the places that were most convenient. The same rule must have been observed during the ages of persecution. But when Christianity had become the religion of the Roman Empire, baptisteries were erected adjoining churches, and baptisms in private, unless under exceptional circumstances, were forbidden. Many of the Italian churches are still provided with separate baptisteries. In the mediaeval Church of England the font was placed just inside the church door, to symbolize admission by baptism into the Church. The font at the west end of the church and the altar at the east end are symbolical of the Christian's sacramental life from its beginning to its highest attainment.

The second rubric in the Office for Private Baptism says that children are not to be baptized at home 'without great cause and necessity.'

The Time for Baptism. Until the eight century it was not customary to baptize, unless in cases of emergency, at any period of the year except the season between Easter and Whitsuntide. Easter was probably selected because of our symbolical resurrection in baptism to 'newness of life'; Whitsuntide because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. In the Eastern Church Epiphany was also assigned for the administration of Baptism in memory of our Lord's Baptism, which was commemorated in that Church at Epiphany (see p. 211). The first rubric in the Office for Private Baptism directs that the baptism of children should not be deferred

longer than the first or second Sunday after their birth, or other holy day falling between, except on some 'great and reasonable cause.' The time in the service fixed for baptism was evidently chosen because (1) the greatest number of people are then present, (2) the canticle that follows is a suitable song of praise and thanksgiving, and (3) the baptized, if old enough, can at once join in the Creed and Lord's Prayer.

The Form of the Sacrament was enjoined by our Lord when He directed His Apostles to baptize 'in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' This form has always been considered by the Church to be indispensable.

The Inward Grace of baptism consists in (1) a death unto sin, (2) a new birth unto righteousness. Thus, St. Paul; "But ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified,' coupling with the washing both justification and sanctification (1 Cor. Vi. 11. R. V). So, St. Peter called upon the Jews to repent and be baptized 'for the remission of sins.' Cf. St. John iii. 5; Acts xxii. 16; 1 cor. Xii. 13. We inherit from Adam, and, indeed, sin. We receive in baptism a gift of spiritual life by which that innate tendency to evil may be counteracted. No one disputes the existence of this hereditary inclination to evil. Surely it ought not to be considered surprising that God has provided a means whereby it may be counteracted. The grace of regeneration is the antidote to original sin, if we would but make a right use of it.

Freedom that comes from being saved which our baptism symbolizes are:

1) **Freedom from the power of sin** (Romans 6:11 – 14) has the followings

...

Here Paul said, count yourselves dead to sin" which means that we should regard our old sinful nature as dead and unresponsive to sin because of our union and identification with Christ. We are no longer obligated to carry out those old motives, desires and goals. It is impossible to be

neutral. Every person has a master – either God or sin. A Christian is not someone who cannot sin, but someone who is no longer a slave to sin. He or she belongs to God. You are free to choose between two masters, but you are not free to manipulate the consequences of your choice. Each of the two masters pays with his own kind of currency. The currency of sin is death. That is all you can expect or hope for in life without God. Christ currency is eternal life – new life with God that begins on earth and continues forever with God.

The power and penalty of sin died with Christ on the Cross. Our old self, our sinful nature, died once and for all, so we are free from its power. The 'body of sin' is not the human body but our rebellious sin loving nature inherited from Adam through our body willing cooperates with our sinful nature, we must not regard the body as evil. It is the sin in us that is evil. And it is this power of sin at work in our body that is defeated. Paul has already stated that through faith in Christ we stand acquitted "not guilty" before God. Here, Paul emphasizes that we need no longer live under sin's power. God does not take us out of the world or make us robots – we will still feel like sinning and sometimes we will sin. The difference is that before we were saved, we were slaves to our sinful nature, but now we can choose to live for Christ (see Gal. 2:20), Jesus Christ said "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" John 8:36.

- 2) **Freedom from the dominion of the law**: Where there is no law, there is no sin, because people can not know that their actions are sinful unless a law forbids those actions. God's law makes people realize that they are sinners doomed to die, yet it offers help. Sin is real and it is dangerous. Sin deceives people by misusing the law. The law is holy expressing God's nature and will for people. In the Garden of Eden (Gen.3), the serpent deceived Eve by taking her focus off the freedom she had and putting it on the one restriction God had made. Ever since then, we have all been rebels. Sin looks good to us precisely because God has said it is wrong. Instead of paying attention to his warnings we use them as a "to do" list. When we are tempted to rebel, we need to look at the law from a wider perspective – in the light of God's grace and mercy. If we focus on

God's great love for us, we will understand that He only restricts us from actions and attitudes that ultimately will harm us.

Paul shows that the law is powerless to save the sinner (Rom. 7:7-14), the law keeper (Rom.7:15-22) and even the person with a new nature (Rom. 7:23-25). The sinner is condemned by the law; the law keeper cannot live up to it, and the person with the new nature finds his or her obedience to the law sabotaged by the effects of the old nature. Paul declares that salvation cannot be found by obeying the law. No matter who we are, only Jesus Christ can set us free.

- 3) **Freedom to become like Christ and discover God's limitless love:**
The fact is that the whole human race is on death row. Without Jesus we would have no hope at all. But thank God He has declared us 'not guilty' and has offered us freedom from sin and power to do His will.

Paul divides people into two categories – those who let themselves be controlled by their sinful natures and those who follow after the Holy Spirit. All of us would be in the first category if Jesus had not offered us a way out. Once we have said yes to Jesus, we will want to continue following Him because his way brings life and peace. Daily we must consciously choose to center our lives in God. Use the Bible to discover God's guidelines and then follow them. In every perplexing situation ask yourself "What would Jesus want me to do? When the Holy Spirit points out what is right, do it eagerly. Have you ever worried about whether or not you really are a Christian? A Christian is anyone who has the Spirit of God living in him or her. If you have sincerely trusted Christ for your salvation and acknowledged Him as Lord, then the Holy Spirit has come into your life and you are a Christian. You will not know that the Holy Spirit has come if you are waiting for a certain feeling, you will know He has come because Jesus promised He would. When the Holy Spirit is working within you, you will believe that Jesus Christ is God's Son and that eternal life comes through Him (1 John 5:5), you will begin to act as Christ directs (Romans 8:5, Gal. 5:22, 23) you will find help in your daily problems and in your praying (Rom. 8:26 & 27); you will be empowered to serve God and do His

will (Acts 1:8, Rom. 12:6ff) and you will become part of God's plan to build up His church (Eph. 4:12 & 13).

In Romans, Paul presents the idea that salvation is past, present and future. It is past because we were saved the moment we believed in Jesus Christ as Saviour through our baptism (Rom. 3:21-26, 5:1-11, 6:1-11, 22, 23) our new life (eternal life) begins at that moment. It is present because we are being saved; this is the process of sanctification (Rom. 6:1-8-39). But at the same time we have not fully received all the benefits and blessings of salvation that will be ours when Christ's new kingdom is completely established. That is our future salvation. While we can be confident of our salvation we still look ahead with hope and trust towards that complete change of body and personality that lies beyond this life when we will be like Christ (1John 3:2).

I like to conclude with the question and answer in the Church Catechism;

Question: Who gave you this name?

Answer: My God fathers and God mothers in my baptism; wherein I was made a member of Christ; the child of God, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Thus, through the sacrament of baptism, we become

- a) A member of Christ
- b) The child of God and
- c) An inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven.

What a heritage!

Your Bishop and Friend.

+ *Olubayo Ilesa.*