

Easter Vigil Service
“FROM DEATH TO LIFE”

April 7, 2007

TEXT: Romans 6:3-11

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A reading from Romans 6:3-11:

“Or do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

In the Name of the Father of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This evening, as we gather for this first celebration of Easter, we are about to witness the complete reversal of a cycle which has come to be understood as “natural.” I am talking about the cycle of life and death. This cycle begins with life. Life is precious, the birth of a new child is indeed a joyful time to celebrate God’s gift of life. But for every life that is given, death waits lurking. We don’t like to think about that, but inevitably death comes for us all. Some would even say that death comes “naturally” when we reach a certain age and have lived our lives in full.

And these are the terms in which we speak about it – life and then death. But, not the other way around. You don’t often hear people speaking about “death or life” situations, it’s “life or death.” Because life comes first, and *then* there is death, which is seen as the end.

Not so with Christ! With Him there is a complete reversal of finality of death, which is completely unnatural - a corruption of God’s perfect creation. In His crucifixion and resurrection, Christ made right what went wrong. The norm for us who have been united with Christ, the standard by which we live our lives has been reversed. Our existence is not *life, then death, then that’s the end*. In Christ, we’ve been given something new. In Christ, we go **FROM DEATH TO LIFE**, to a life which will never end.

Death really does come before the life that Christ gives to us in Baptism. Scripture tells us that the *one trespass of Adam brought condemnation for all men* (Romans 5:18). And so, we are *sinful from the time of our conception* (Psalm 51:5), *dead in our trespasses and sins* (Ephesians 2:1). At the conception of life there is already the promise of death on account of our sins.

With this death already in our flesh, God does something extraordinary through the waters of Holy Baptism. Through Baptism, St. Paul tells us that we are united with Christ in His crucifixion and death – we are buried with Him in the tomb. In death, then we are freed from that very thing which brings death, sin. “Because,” Paul says, “anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”

And so, Christ – who became sin for us, whose lifeless body was tortured and mangled on account of our sin - was laid in the tomb to rest. Our sin put Him there, He took that sin of ours upon Himself on the cross and He took it to the grave.

We don't have to go to that tomb to leave our sins with Christ. For Christ has come to us. Through the blessed Sacrament of Holy Baptism, our Old Adam, that old sinful nature which we all inherited at the very moment of our conception, was put to death.

For many of us our parents with other faithful sponsors carried us to that font. For some, being baptized some time later in life, you were old enough to understand what it all meant (at least to some degree). Either way, when the water was poured upon your head and the words of Christ were connected with that water, your fate was sealed. You became God's child and an heir of the promise that God had given to His children Israel.

And now, each day, you walk in the grace of your Baptism. Being baptized "indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." Each day of the Christian Life is a journey **FROM DEATH TO LIFE.**

Thankfully, our union with Christ didn't end there at the font. For "all Christians should regard their baptism as the daily garment that they wear all the time." (Large Catechism). It is our union with Christ, not only in His death, but also in His Resurrection, which is life eternal! The stone was rolled away proclaiming victory over death.

It is a victory which completely reversed that cycle of life and death. That last great enemy of death has been defeated for us. And we receive that victory and life through Baptism.

One of my favorite Easter hymns, *Jesus Lives the Victory's Won*, concludes with this stanza "Jesus lives! And now is death but the gate of life immortal This shall calm my trembling breath when I pass its gloomy portal. Faith shall cry, as fails each sense: Jesus is my confidence!" AMEN

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. AMEN