

Easter Vigil

I was baptized three days after I was born. I guess my parents took one look at me, knew that I was a sinner, and decided they'd better do something right away. There are some years when the anniversary of my baptism falls on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, which I think is pretty cool. Many years ago, my parents decided to clean out the closets at home, They gave each of their children a box of items from our childhood. They had saved our report cards from grade school, letters we had written to them, news items that pertained to us. They also gave me the original copy of my baptismal certificate. When I looked at it, I realized that the priest who baptized me had been the associate pastor, so I wondered if he was still alive. I looked him up, and, sure enough, he had recently retired. I wrote him a letter. He was flabbergasted. He had no idea that an infant he baptized over 40 years ago was now a priest. He had tried many years to encourage young men to enter the seminary, so it gave him satisfaction to know that he had an important role in the life of one priest.

Not everyone who is baptized becomes a priest or enters religious life, but we all become Christian. Our baptism should have a permanent effect on the way we live. Saint Paul says to the Romans, "You must think of yourselves as being dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus." When we witness a baptism, it reminds us to put aside temptations and live for Christ. Tonight we will renew our baptismal promises, which will help us in this effort. This practice is so important that the Catholic Church offers a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions to those who renew their baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil or on the anniversary of their own baptism.

Many people have taken an interest in indulgences because of this holy year of mercy. Through an indulgence we receive not only forgiveness of sin, but also freedom from the punishment that comes from sin. All this is good, but it does not replace the value of living every day the way St. Paul describes: We should be dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus. The apostles probably baptized people in the flowing waters of a river, the way Jesus was baptized. The word "baptism" comes from a word meaning "to dip". Going underwater and coming up again shows that people should be dead to sin and living for God; it imitates Jesus going down into the tomb and rising from the dead.

Some people do not come to communion every week. They think that they are sinners and not worthy to receive. But communion may be the very thing they need. Weekly communion helps us live as baptism demands.

At the end of my life my funeral mass will probably take place about three days after I die, as my baptism took place three days after I was born. At the beginning of a funeral, the priest sprinkles the coffin with blessed water, and he refers to the passage from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans that we heard this evening: "In the waters of baptism, this person died with Christ and rose with him to new life. May he or she now share with him eternal glory."

Every day - not just the day of our baptism, not just the Easter Vigil, not just the anniversary of our baptism - but every day, let us turn away from sin and live for God in Christ.