



The Word...

“Brothers and sisters:

Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus
were baptized into his death?

We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death,
so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,
we too might live in newness of life.

If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.

We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more;
death no longer has power over him. As to his death, he died to sin once and
for all; as to his life, he lives for God. Consequently, you too must think of
yourselves as dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus”

” (Rom 6:3-4, 8-11).

Pondering the Word ...

If you were with us last Sunday, you might remember I included a story about the old, now defunct Catholic doctrine of Limbo—the place babies supposedly went if they died before being baptized. Because of this doctrine, I’d say most of the people I know were baptized soon after their birth. So, I’d guess most were unaware that they were being baptized into Christ’s death as well! 😊 All kidding aside, do you understand what this passage means and how it relates to our theme of living in the Spirit?

Let’s look back on Jesus’ baptism, one of the few stories found in all four gospels where the details are pretty consistent: In the Jewish tradition, full immersion in water (*tvilah*) was used for ritual purification. John the Baptist uses this ritual practice as a way for people to cleanse themselves before the coming of the Kingdom, and so this man, Jesus of Nazareth, joins in and is blessed by the Spirit...the Spirit that stays with him through the trials and tribulations of his life and death, and in the glory of his resurrected life...the same Spirit who is with us as well, through all the joys and sorrows of our lives, the deaths we experience, both figuratively and literally, and the times we rise up from the ashes of loss and disappointment.

“Dead to sin” does not mean we no longer sin or that we live lives free of the sorrow and pain caused by the world’s sinfulness. No, it means that despite sin, we live filled with the hope of the Spirit who helps us to take up our cross every day, confident in life everlasting.

Living the Word...

This is tough stuff for us to comprehend. But just because we don’t empirically understand it doesn’t mean it isn’t real. Too often, we fail to look at the resurrections that happen every day in our lives and the lives of the people around us. We take the Spirit for granted. We look at things literally, linearly, and have a “start-to-finish” view of our existence. The Spirit lives in you, right now. The Kingdom is right now, and the Christ calls each one of us to be alive in the Spirit each day, not allowing sin to have the last word. Each morning, make a conscious commitment to look for the Spirit. Ask the Spirit for help to do so. Live for God in Christ.

Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

Mon, Jul 3: *"You are members of the household of God... being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit"* (Eph 2:19-22). **Reflection/Provision:** A great reading for reflecting on our two themes: living in the Spirit and in community. Those blessed to grow up in stable, loving homes know that living in a household is no guarantee of peace and quiet, but it is a place of acceptance and forgiveness. Even if you don't have that in your family or community, rest assured it's the main feature of God's household! I worry we can get so wrapped up in our own salvation, we fail to understand the inextricable link between our life and the lives of others: *"Your life and my life flow into each other as wave flows into wave, and unless there is peace and joy and freedom for you, there can be no real peace or joy or freedom for me"* (Frederick Buechner). We are meant to build together, accepting and forgiving each other. Look today for opportunities to be an active member of God's household.

Tue, Jul 4: *"Don't look back or stop anywhere on the Plain..."* But Lot's wife looked back, and she was turned into a pillar of salt (Gn 19:15-29). **Reflection/Provision:** Most of us have "rubbernecked" at some point, turning our heads to look at a traffic accident or some other incident, or to read a sad story. Psychologists offer explanations for this, but, you know, it's hard not to look. Lot's wife probably had friends in Sodom and a comfortable life there. But she was stuck in the past, and therefore condemned to stay stuck. Does this ring any familiar bells? If memories—good or bad—have you stuck in place, ask the Spirit to use these as nourishment for growth and strength to move forward. *"Don't look back. You're not going that way"* (Mary Engelbreit).

Wed, Jul 5: *"The Lord hears the cry of the poor"* (Ps 34). **Reflection/Provision:** Two recent news stories, both tragedies occurring on the high seas: the first, the loss of hundreds of men, women, and children—many from Pakistan—who took a big risk and spent all their savings to seek a better life. The second, a few very rich men who took a big risk and spent some of their riches for a deep dive to see a sunken ship. All loss of life is mourned. I pray for all the families left behind, but let's consider: how much money was spent trying to rescue the thrill seekers? How much news coverage did this story get versus stories of those lost when an overcrowded fishing boat sunk? (There is a wonderful story about a multi-million-dollar yacht rescuing 100 of the refugees but that didn't get much coverage either.) I'm not getting on a soapbox here, but it does make me pause and reflect on how and what we value. *"The Lord hears the cry of the poor."* Have mercy, Lord, on all the poor souls lost who are now in your care.

Thu, Jul 6: *"Their idols are silver and gold, the handiwork of men. They have mouths but speak not; they have eyes but see not; they have ears but hear not...their makers shall be like them, everyone who trusts in them"* (Ps 115).

Reflection/Provision: Another news topic of late: Artificial Intelligence (AI). Again, no soapbox here. I need to learn more about it and the good things it can do before I accuse those who create it of worshipping a false god. But should we worry? Yes, because, like so many other false gods past and present, AI involves money—lots of money. So far, it's been easy for me to dismiss it as something beyond my comprehension, but it can, in very short order, dramatically change humanity and the Earth. *"Their makers shall be like them"*: artificial, with mouths and eyes and ears, but no souls. Let's pray we use our God-given RI (real intelligence) for good.

Fri, Jul 7: [Jesus] saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, *"Follow me"* (Mt 9:9-13).

Up to this point, the only disciples Jesus has called are Simon Peter, Andrew, James, and John, all fishermen who know each other; they might even be related. Then, Jesus calls Matthew—a tax collector. I bet the guys know him too...as one who takes some of their hard-earned money for himself!! I can see the sideways glances between the others, and I want to say, *"Hold on to your hats, boys. The fun is just beginning!"* **Reflection/Provision:** Ok, fess up: Have there been times when you've looked askance when someone you don't care for wants to join your ministry subcommittee? A new volunteer shows up at the food pantry but you're *just* not so sure they will fit in with "the group?" The next time you find yourself assessing the worthiness of another, think of Jesus and Matthew. Can you look past your biases to see the potential in someone you doubted?

Sat, Jul 8: *"People do not put new wine into old wineskins"* (Mt 9:14-17). **Reflection/Provision:** Go back to the story of Lot's wife. She longed for the old wine in old wineskins, but it had turned bitter; it was no longer life-giving. She got stuck nonetheless. There comes a time in all our lives to move on, to new wine in new wineskins. And moving on can be hard and bitter at first. Pray with this Scripture if you are discerning a move forward.