

***The Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Sixteenth Sunday After Pentecost (Latin Mass)  
September 12, 2021  
Year of the Eucharist and Parish (Reflection #35)***

*“The supernatural life of grace has a beginning, and we call that beginning baptism.”  
(My Way of Life, The Summa Simplified for Everyone, p.520)*

As I began last weekend, first public act of Jesus, recorded in Saint Matthew’s Gospel, was to proceed to the River Jordan to be baptized by Saint John the Baptist. We believe, the baptism of John was indeed a baptism of repentance. We also believe Jesus, being both fully God and Man as well as completely free of sin, would have no personal need for this type of baptism. Yet, He would still begin His ministry of our salvation by allowing Himself to be baptized. Therefore, His baptism holds a deep meaning; a meaning we will attempt to explain.

We spent last weekend reflecting upon the sacraments. We professed that all of the sacraments were divinely and purposely instituted by Christ, and find their meaning in the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ. Concerning the sacrament of baptism, we believe this sacrament was instituted by Jesus the moment He was baptized. In a very real way, the water, which John used to signify a person turning away from sin and turning toward God, actually received the power to sanctify the moment it touched the body of our Lord Jesus. The power to make men holy through the baptismal washing away of all sin (original and actual if a person is an adult) comes from Jesus. This grace given through this sacrament, as well as any sacrament, is not dependent upon the holiness of the minister. Its power comes from the Passion of Jesus.

We can now rightly say that the reason Jesus received the baptism of Saint John was to make holy the waters of Baptism. Baptism, by both the actions and words of Jesus, now becomes necessary. More precisely, baptism is necessary for our salvation. *“Jesus answered: Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”* (John 3:5)

Due to the serious nature of this sacrament, one now must inquire concerning those who were born, lived, and died without ever receiving the sacrament of Baptism. We now ask: “What happens to them?” Does God create any person without providing that person an opportunity to go to Heaven? The Catholic Church would come to understand that there are situations when a person, through no fault of their own, will never come to know God much less His Son Jesus Christ. Therefore, in His Divine Mercy, God has guided His Catholic Church to understand and believe in two other means in which a form of baptism could occur. Besides the normal method of baptism by water, we now accept baptism by blood and baptism by desire. Put simply, a person can shed their blood (baptism by blood) as a martyr for their belief in God and His Son Jesus. Secondly, there have been many instances in which a person desired to live a good life. This entailed their desire to please God and live by His Will, as best they understood Him and His Will. They also sought to avoid sin. Again, this is how they understood sin and sinful actions against God and neighbor. Both of these situations can apply to pagan people who lived without ever knowing God or Jesus. In these cases, we would say that if this person had had the opportunity to come to know God, Jesus, and the necessity of Baptism, then they would have desired to be baptized (baptism of desire). The take away is this — God in His Mercy will offer men of every generation the opportunity for salvation as best as they are able to comprehend salvation. God is a Father and as a father to all, He desires all of His children to be with Him for all eternity. Because of this great love, He desires His Catholic Church to go and seek His children in every corner of the world so that they may come to hear His Word and receive His gift of Baptism.