

Jan 8, 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

How many of us, whenever we consider the Sacrament of Baptism, along with all its sacramental signification, bring to mind the notion of SUFFERING? I would venture to say that most of us, instead, relate the more positive aspects of baptism—becoming adopted sons or daughters of Christ, freedom from the slavery of sin, the washing away of Original Sin and actual sin, as well as all the punishments due to sin, etc. We might even have a quite glorified understanding of what it means to be standing there, having now been baptized—glowing with radiant whiteness, cleanliness, and (at least for a relatively brief moment) a direct pass into the gates of Heaven!

When I became a Catholic in 2007, I will never forget how amazingly powerful it was for me to ponder in my heart, exactly what it was God had done to and for me. All I could think about was how sinful a life I had been leading, and even though I deserved none of it, God both invited me into His Kingdom, and actually accepted me! But there was something profoundly important that I was not considering. Now that I had become a Christian, I failed to realize exactly what I was accepting, in taking on this new title of “Christian”.

In our receiving of baptism, we become “sacramentally assimilated to Jesus” (CCC 537). What is entailed in this? I can easily argue there to be a relatively infinite amount of things involved, but as a first step, let us simply recognize that our baptism demands a correspondence with the Baptism of our Lord, Jesus Christ. For in His receiving baptism, He “accept[ed] and inaugurat[ed]. . . His mission as God’s suffering Servant” (CCC 536), having anticipated His own death and resurrection (cf. CCC 537). The Catechism continues: “The Christian must enter into this mystery of humble self-abasement and repentance, go down into the water with Jesus in order to rise with him, be reborn of water and the Spirit, so as to become the Father’s beloved son in the Son and ‘walk in newness of life’ (CCC 537).

What is all this saying? Not only at the time of our baptism, but in fact, EVERY MOMENT OF EVERY DAY, we must live out the reality of our baptism, and choose the path of SUFFERING; that is, a life which seeks a submission NOT to our will, but to the will of the Father—and not merely a part of our will, but our WHOLE WILL; our WHOLE SELF. Practically speaking, this means that in whatever choices we make, we can, with a firm faith, say to ourselves and to God: “In making this free decision, and choosing to act and move in this particular direction, I believe I am fulfilling God’s will for me.” Of course, this may not be easy to see at first, and may require great discernment. Nevertheless, it is a path we are called to take.

So then, how does the notion of suffering fit in? If we conform our intellect and our will to God, as Christ did to His Father in Heaven, then we too will find ourselves willingly engaging in the very Sorrowful Mysteries which we pray in the Rosary. We will find ourselves praying with Jesus, with tears falling on that rock in the Garden of Gethsemane; we will find ourselves “scourged” and “crowned” at nearly every turn in our daily lives; we will feel the weight of the Cross at every observance of sin around us; and we will die with Christ at Calvary. But in doing so, we will also find ourselves becoming sharers of His divine Life, and helpers in the on-going redemption of all our neighbors in the world.

In Christ through Mary,

Mr. Andrew M. Steele