

Wednesday of Reminiscere, A ✕ D 2009

1 Peter 3:18-22 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Naaman was proud, and not without good reason. He was commander of army of the king of Syria; he had lead the army to resounding victories. He was well-respected by his men and well-liked by the king. He was the hero in the action movie every little boy wants to emulate when he leads his army of toy soldiers into battle. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. When he heard there was a prophet in Samaria who could cure leprosy, he obtained permission from the king of Syria to make the journey, loaded up 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten changes of clothes to persuade the prophet to perform the miracle he would request.

2 When Naaman came to Elisha, Elisha sent a messenger out to him, telling him to dip himself in the Jordan River seven times. So Naaman huffed away in anger. "Behold I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the Lord, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" Naaman wanted more of a show, wanted something more convincing, something more impressive, than the water of the shallow Jordan River to do away with his disease. But when God attaches His Word to something—even something as ordinary as water—it does what His Word promises.

3 Despisers of the Lord's gift of Holy Baptism have this in common with Naaman: they distrust the Lord's promise to work through something so ordinary as water. But when God has

attached a promise even to ordinary water, you may by no means despise it. "What benefits does baptism give? It works the forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare. Which are these words and promises of God? Christ our Lord says in the last chapter of Mark, 'Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.'"

4 How might you despise the Lord's gift of Baptism? Three ways. You despise baptism by supposing that the Lord would not stoop so low as to work through the means of ordinary water to deliver His precious gifts of faith and forgiveness of sins. But that baptism saves there can be no doubt. As the Apostle Peter says, eight persons were saved through the flood, and baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you. How can baptism save you? Because God has attached His promise to it, because He has staked His name on it. Repent of mistrusting His promise.

5 You despise baptism by overestimating the goodness of your human nature. Those who refuse to be baptized or who refuse to bring their children to the waters of Holy Baptism fail to realize the leprous rot of flesh with which they were born. Because it bestows the forgiveness of sins, baptism is for sinners. And everyone, until given the gift of faith, St. Paul says, is dead in his transgressions and sins (Eph 2:1), even infants, as David prayed, "Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." You needn't foolishly wait until children reach some arbitrary, un-Scriptural age of accountability. Sinners need forgiveness immediately.

6 So, Jesus holds up infants as model Christians, telling the crowds that, "Unless you receive the kingdom of God like a little child, you will by no means enter it." Children receive what they are given; it's not faith adults are better at having but doubt. To say infants cannot have faith delivered to them is to make of faith a work. Even the psalmist confesses, "You are

He who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts" (Ps. 22:9).

Faith is a gift. Repent for thinking of the unregenerate as anything but dead.

7 You despise baptism by seeking some more convincing evidence of your salvation.

How can you be confident of your salvation? Looking to any works in yourself—a list of good deeds, a decision to ask Jesus into your life, or an act of the will to believe in God—will give you no certainty. But the Lord has given you a more certain—indeed, a perfect—source of confidence: Himself. In Holy Baptism, He alone acts to claim you as His own. That's the beauty of baptism: it draws your attention and your hope for salvation away from yourself. Repent of looking anywhere but to His action for confidence in your salvation.

8 Forgiveness of sins, rescue from death and the devil, and eternal salvation: these are the gifts bestowed upon you in the waters of Holy Baptism. No matter how the hymn wants you to answer the question, you weren't there when they crucified the Lord. You weren't there when they nailed Him to the tree. You weren't there when the sinless Son of God died as payment for all the world's sinfulness, even yours. But it doesn't matter; you don't need to have been there. At the cross, Jesus won forgiveness, salvation and eternal life for you, but He didn't give it out there. He gives it out at the font. And, yes, you were there.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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