

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism

What is Baptism?

Baptism is not water only, but it is water used together with God's Word and by his command.



What is this Word?

In Matthew 28 our Lord Jesus says "go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

Back in my seminary days I was part of a group of students who met with Dr. George Anderson for theological reflection. He had given us an assignment to name the one doctrine that was most important to our faith, a doctrine that we couldn't live without. That day I was ready to argue that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was the most significant Christian doctrine of all. With a naive arrogance I was confident that my answer was the right one. We all took our turns. Finally it was Dr. Anderson's turn to tell us that for him, the most significant doctrine was *baptism*. I remember feeling let down by his selection. I expected *more* from this gifted teacher, theologian and church historian.

Then he began to explain his answer, and I realized how profound God's gift of baptism truly is. First, he reminded us that baptism is one's *first experience of God's grace and forgiveness*. It is our entrance into God's community of the church, and it joins us to Christ's death and resurrection. Baptism therefore gives every Christian his or her deepest identity as a beloved child of God!

Second, said Dr. Anderson, in baptism "I am called into my vocation by God to love and serve others and be a disciple of Jesus Christ. If I had to choose between my ordination and my baptism, my baptism is far more important because it gives me everything that I must have for a living faith in a living Lord who lives in me and loves others through me."

Third, he reminded us that it is this gift of God's grace that keeps on giving us, day after day, new life, forgiveness, and energy through all the challenges and difficulties of this life. He concluded, "Baptism reminds me every day of my central identity as a forgiven sinner and child of God even when the world tries to tell me I need some other identity to prove my worth." Ever since that day I have grown in my appreciation for the daily significance of living out one's baptism.

An image of baptism that I think might be helpful is a hydroelectric dam. Whether it is the great Hoover Dam out west or the Lake Murray dam, it doesn't matter. What matters is that at the bottom of these dams are giant turbines that produce incredible amounts of energy for our homes and industries. The force of gravity pulls down the moving water to turn the turbines, producing an abundance of electricity.

What if we thought about the waters of our baptism flowing continuously in us and through us towards others in a way similar to the workings of a hydroelectric dam? What if the daily waters of God's grace and mercy are abundantly available, giving us the energy we need to forgive those who wrong us and to serve those in need? What if the next time we get weary, discouraged in our efforts at ministry, and low in energy for serving, we pause to remember our baptism and to let Christ's loving presence renew and refresh our lives?