

I think my favorite service, as a priest, to serve, is the baptism of an infant. It's one of the most magnificent events in all of the life of our Church. To add another member to the Body of Christ; to call on the Holy Spirit to lead and guide this new person through their whole life and eventually into the Kingdom of Heaven. Every time we're present for a baptism, in thinking about the transformation that the baptized has just undergone [so wonderfully spoken of by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, read at the baptismal service], we're given a chance also to reflect on our own entrance into the life of Christ and the Church.

Our baptisms and chrismations should not be seen by us as simply starting points from some time in the past (perhaps even not remembered by us consciously). Our baptisms also are not the end—our decision for Christ is not finished in baptism. Newly baptized infants will grow up, and they will be faced with the same decisions all Christians face, to live for Christ each day (take up your cross daily, the Lord commands), or to live for something else (ourselves, world, pleasure). Instead of viewing our baptisms as static moments in the past, our baptism should have a living significance for each us at this present moment (and at every moment in our Christian lives).

We said that baptism isn't simply an initiation, and it's also not the end of all things—but St. Gregory of Nyssa writes that the baptismal font is both a womb and a tomb (beginning and an end). In baptism, we die to the old man—to the man of the world, of the flesh, to the man of sin. And in baptism, we're re-born a new man—in Christ, filled with the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit. We're a new creature, by the grace of God, as St. Paul clearly explained in our Epistle reading this morning. There is a baptismal dimension to our whole life—baptism is the beginning and the foundation of ALL Christian life. This baptismal dimension that runs throughout our lives is unfolded for us by Sts. Kallistos and Ignatios in the *Philokalia*—they write “the aim of the Christian life is to return to the most perfect grace of the most Holy and life giving Spirit originally conferred on us in baptism.”

When we're baptized into Christ and we put on Christ and we die to the old man, for those moments, we're perfect. We've been reborn in the image of Christ, and until we sully that image with sin, we are in baptism what mankind was created from the beginning to be—the image and likeness of God. So the baptismal dimension of our lives is the reality that the moment of our baptism is a state, a perfection, that we'll seek again for the remainder of our lives. St. Silouan writes that the real struggle of the Christian life is how to retain the grace of God, and not squander it and chase it away by our sin.

Baptismal grace certainly on one hand is complete - we're reborn in Christ and we receive the grace and the presence of the Holy in our lives. We can't add to this mystery of grace. But we do progressively discover it and make it more manifest in our daily lives. We learn to live our baptism the more we practice living the Christian life in the world. The baptized is sealed as a newly enlisted warrior of Christ-it's a real battle to separate ourselves from the ways of the world and to follow Christ (it's not easy-St. Paul even writes that he fails to do the things he's supposed to do, and he does things he's not supposed to do). But all the gifts of grace are contained potentially in baptism. Everything is there-in baptism we receive the potential of all of the gifts of grace that we see in the Scriptures and the lives of the Saints. We then just have to decide what to do with this grace; a decision we all have to make every day. To make use of the grace of God for the Kingdom of Heaven, or to have his focus somewhere else.

The Christian life can be described as a journey from baptismal grace to baptismal grace. If we are actively engaged in living a Christian life, then we gradually become more and more conscious of the grace of God within us. We can sum up the Christian journey with the phrase-become what you are. The baptized are already the bearers of Christ, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Our journey is to live that reality.

As a final quote, we'll hear from St. Mark the Ascetic, commenting on the relationship we have with our baptism into Christ. He writes: however far someone may advance in faith, however great the blessings he attains, he never discovers anything more than what he has already received mystically through baptism; Christ being perfect God, bestows on the baptized the perfect grace of the Holy Spirit; we cannot possibly add to that grace, but it is constantly revealed to us and manifest in us in proportion to our fulfillment of the commandments (as we put ourselves on the way of Christ, the things of Christ become more evident in our lives); whatever we offer to God after our baptismal regeneration was already potentially within us and came originally from Him.

We give thanks to God for the newly illumined child and his family this morning, and as we step into the world after the conclusion of the Liturgy, remember that the grace of God from Holy Baptism is an ever-present reality in our lives - our duty is to live up to the great gifts that God has given us.

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!