

# Trinity Sunday

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Date: 30 May 2021

Preacher: Fr. Paul Beutell

[ 0 : 00 ] Marvel not that I said unto you, you must be born again. Verse from this morning's Holy Gospel, in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

What does it mean to be born again? And how does this amazing work of God occur? In this morning's Gospel lesson, Jesus explains it quite clearly for us.

He told Nicodemus, unless a man is born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. In St. Matthew 28, verse 19, Jesus teaches how this is fulfilled in the mission of the church. He states, go therefore and make disciples of all nations. And then he tells us how. Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus teaches that anyone who is born again into discipleship is so by holy baptism. Baptism is a sacrament.

[ 1 : 12 ] It is an outward invisible sign of an invisible grace given to us by God. The outward invisible sign is water. The inward invisible grace given is regeneration, the new spiritual life.

By baptism, we are resurrected from the death. We inherit from Adam in the fall, and birth into the new life we inherit from Jesus Christ by his resurrection.

We, you and I, whose souls were dead to God in trespasses and sins, are regenerated. Our souls are made alive to him by the washing of water and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.

By baptism, we are included in the salvation wrought when Jesus was lifted up on the pole. By it, we are enabled to believe in him unto everlasting life.

Baptism is not a work of man. It is the gift of God. We cannot regenerate ourselves. Not by washing ourselves. Not by making a profession of faith.

[ 2 : 25 ] Not by doing good works. No, we have to be washed by water and renewed by the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of baptism. Regeneration is a Trinitarian activity.

Jesus says this in St. John 3, 8, The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.

Despite the clarity of our Lord's and really all of Scripture's teaching, there is still a lot being disputed as to what it means to be born again and when it occurs.

This, though, is not always the case. For over 1,500 years, even into the early years of the Reformation, all Christians believed and taught that baptism was the means by which a man was born again.

It wasn't until around 1525 that changed with the Anabaptist movement. Anabaptist simply means one who baptizes again.

[ 3 : 35 ] The Anabaptists concluded that because some, or maybe at that time many who had been baptized, fell away from the faith, there was a defect in the sacrament, especially when administered to infants and young children.

Despite St. Peter telling the first converts on Pentecost, the covenant promises of regeneration of holy baptism are given to you and to your children.

They concluded children should not be baptized. In doing so, they rejected St. Paul's teaching in Colossians 2, verses 11 and 12, where the apostle writes, In Christ, you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Christ through faith in the working of God.

Holy baptism is the circumcision made without hands. Holy baptism is the circumcision of Christ. We know that circumcision was administered eight days after birth, as God signed to the child, to his parents, and to the old covenant community that he now belonged to God.

Baptism fulfills this. And as Galatians 3, verses 28 and 29 teaches, it is given equally and efficaciously to males and to females.

[ 5 : 14 ] But holy baptism is not only a sign to the child, to his or her parents, to the new covenant community, the church, that he or she now belongs to God. It is the means by which they are given new spiritual life.

It is the means by which they, by which we all, are born again. The sacrament affects what it signs. A question I've often heard is, what is the problem with making a person wait until they are of age before they are baptized? The problem is twofold. First, it teaches that a man is born again by his or her own profession of faith, and not by water and the Spirit, which directly contradicts the teachings of Christ.

And second, it turns the sacrament into a sign man gives to God instead of God's sign to man. Both are quite problematic. Believer baptism, as it is now called, changes the initiation of salvation from being theocentric.

God's active work within the soul of passive man to being anthropocentric, the work of active man displayed to a passive God.

[ 6 : 39 ] This goes against Ephesians 2, verses 8 and 9, which plainly teaches man is saved by grace through faith, both which are the gift of God and not of works.

Baptism is the means by which God imparts grace to our souls so we can respond by faith, which we do formally at confirmation, and good works, which is daily living the faith.

It is true, some will not respond. Some will reject the grace given. The seed can be sown on rocky and thorny soil, too, and be burned or choked away.

Therefore, children who are baptized must be raised in and taught the faith by parents and godparents and by the church herself. And this way, they will grow in it.

And of course, adult converts and older children need to have proper catechesis and profess the faith before baptism is given. As the world becomes more pre-Christian, we will need to put greater emphasis on this.

[ 7 : 47 ] But the normative means, the normative time for baptism must remain as soon as practical after birth. We mustn't cut children off from the regeneration of their souls and their adoption into the life of the church.

The answer to the dilemma of children falling away from baptismal grace is not to deny them baptism. The answer is for parents and for the church to persistently teach and raise them in the Catholic faith.

And if they do fall away, to call them back to repentance and conversion by the sacrament of penance. What does it mean to be born again?

And when does it occur? It is certain that Jesus and the apostles taught it means being given new life in Christ and that it occurs in the sacrament of holy baptism.

Are we Bible believers and doers of the word or are we not? How we answer and understand questions about baptism is important.

[ 9 : 01 ] For as Jesus told Nicodemus, marvel not that I said unto you, you must be born again. In the name of the Father, in the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.