



Sermon for the Third Sunday after Easter  
By the Most Revd Dr. S. E. McLaughlin  
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## Holy Baptism and Confirmation

*A Sermon Defining and Discussing the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Confirmation*

Last week we began an examination of the Teaching of the Lord, given to His Apostles after the Resurrection from the dead, and imparted in person, before the Ascension. We saw, in the first few verses in the book of Acts, that the Lord, “through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen” (Acts 1: 2). We saw that this was done during the forty days between the Resurrection and the Ascension—and that forty days here are symbolic of the time, according to the Bible, that was used as a preparation of God’s people to accomplish God’s purposes on earth. We are told that the Lord Christ was seen by the Apostles, “and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Acts 1: 3).

We also saw that, immediately after the Ascension and the day of Pentecost, the once feeble, weak-kneed Apostles boldly began to proclaim the great truths of the Gospel, based not upon slow theological development, but by the express instructions of the Lord Himself. The Lord’s own teaching is found in the scriptures inferentially, and proved by the actions of the Apostles. We saw our first example of this last week, in the matter of Divine Healing.

Today we turn our attention to Holy Baptism and Confirmation. After the meaning of the Holy Communion, there is perhaps no other more contentious subject than the meaning of Baptism. A great many of the divisions in the Church today can be traced to arguments over Baptism. There is contention as to its essential meaning, its necessity, the age at which it should be administered, and the mode by which it should be performed. A whole denomination—the largest Protestant body in the United States—was formed by dogmatism regarding the question of whether one must be totally immersed in a pool of water in a *bona fide*, Christian Baptism. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fully twelve translations of the New Testament were produced by theological partisans where the word “baptize” was altered to “immerse” or “dip.” So our subject today is an important one. We must fully understand our Lord’s teaching on the matter and examine if our own tradition matches this instruction.

What is Baptism? The word “baptize” is transliterated from the Greek language of the New Testament, and it means to dip into water. Baptism was a religious practice of the Jews in the New Testament era. Gentiles who converted to Judaism were baptized in a religious ritual that prepared them for inclusion in the nation of Israel. Male converts were circumcised after being baptized. Thus, baptism in the Jewish world of the first century symbolized a washing away of the filth of paganism.

The immediate context for our understanding of Baptism, however, comes from John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. We are told that John’s Baptism was one of repentance from sin (Luke 3: 3), that through faith in the Messiah, those that John baptized might have their sins forgiven (Luke 3: 16,17). John taught the Jews of his day that the sin of Israel was so great, they had need of baptism themselves: it was necessary for them to wash away the effects of sin just as much as it was necessary for a gentile convert. He baptized Jews in the Jordan River, and his converts therefore became the remnant of faithful Israel, the few whose hearts were prepared for the appearance of the Messiah. John said that because the Christ “should be made manifest to Israel, therefore I am come baptizing with water” (John 1: 31). Thus Jesus, too, was baptized of John: it was necessary that He was identified with this faithful remnant—the basis for the New Covenant people of God.

Holy Baptism is a sacrament of the Gospel—instituted by the Lord Himself, and such institution is recorded in Scripture. In St. Matthew’s gospel, we read, just before His Ascension, that “Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28: 18-20). Likewise, St. Mark records in his gospel, that before the Ascension, Jesus instructed the Apostles, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16: 15,16). Baptism, in its intimate connection with trust in God, is necessary for our salvation, for by its sacramental power given by the Lord, we have remission of our sins.

So, we see that Baptism is connected with the remission of sin. And remission of sin is a necessary first step to communion with God. Baptism is thus a rite of initiation into the covenant People of God, whereby one’s sins are remitted, and one is brought into right relationship with his Creator. Baptism is a sacramental act: an outward and visible sign (water) is a means of imparting an inward and spiritual grace (remission of sins). It thus has both an individual character (the forgiveness of sin) and a corporate character (bringing us into the Kingdom).

This understanding of Holy Baptism was granted by the Lord to His Apostles during the forty days He instructed them in the things of the Kingdom of God. The first Apostolic sermon recorded in the scriptures was preached by St. Peter. It was a powerful presentation of the Gospel to the very ones who crucified the Lord:

*Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered*

*by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2: 22-24). “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2: 32, 33). “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls (Acts 2: 37-41).*

Notice, when asked by the crowd, “What shall we do?” in response to the Gospel, St. Peter and the rest of the Apostles give the crowd exact instructions. *First*, they are told to “repent” (a word in the original language that means change your whole orientation to life—in other words, to become obedient to the revelation of the will of God in Jesus Christ). *Second*, “be baptized every one of you” each individual who comes to God must be baptized. *Third*, they must be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ.” This denotes a Christian—as opposed to the old Jewish—baptism; an act that is sacramental in character, for by it is granted “the remission of sins.” Fourth, after baptism, St. Peter teaches that “ye shall receive the Holy Ghost.” This is the sacrament of Confirmation.

In his first Epistle, St. Peter declares plainly that Christian baptism brings one into the state of salvation—justifying us before God by the forgiveness of our sins. St. Peter compared Christian baptism to the flood of Noah. He wrote, “in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. [is] The like figure whereunto even *baptism doth also now save us* (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, *but the answer of a good conscience toward God,*) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him” (1 Peter 3: 20-22).

The Apostles baptized whole families (Acts 16:15, 31-33) men, women, children, and infants, in obedience to our Lord’s command to “Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14). Very early in the Church’s history, the mode of Baptism became less important than that water was used as the outward sign of the sacrament. George Carleton, in his book, *The King’s Highway*, wrote:

*It has always been the custom of the Catholic Church to baptize infants. The reasons for this are such as these. Under the old covenant infants were admitted to the family of God at eight days old, and we cannot think that the blessings of the new covenant are more restricted than those of the old. Our Lord said: Suffer the little children to come unto me, and*

*forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. And, by bestowing his blessing upon them, he showed that even unconscious babes are capable of receiving spiritual benefit. They can receive grace because, though they have not yet any active faith or repentance, yet there is not in them any self-willed impenitence or unbelief to hinder the goodwill of God towards them. The practice of infant baptism is one clear illustration of the Church's belief that in all God's dealings with us the beginning is with him, and our part is to respond to the grace given; that the sacraments are means of grace, and not mere tokens of a state of grace attained apart from them.*

This is not to say that baptism alone is a “one-way ticket to heaven!” It indeed makes us right with God, but it is not some magic amulet. Baptism makes us one of God's people in His kingdom. Baptism is our citizenship in His Kingdom. It gives us the opportunity to obey God and have communion with Him, it grants us, by His grace, the ability to know and experience the love of God here and now, and for eternity, if we do not, as the author of the book of Hebrews states, “fall away” from the wonders of this “heavenly gift” (Hebrews 6: 4-6).

It was not possible that the Apostles developed this complete understanding about Baptism on their own so shortly after the Resurrection. The doctrine of Baptism was taught by Jesus Christ and commanded to His Apostles and their successors. Thus, we should not be surprised to find St. Paul presenting a fully developed theology of the sacrament of holy Baptism, when he wrote:

*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:3-11).*

There is no need for the doctrine of Baptism to be contentious. There is no need for confusion on its necessity. There is no compulsion taught about its mode of administration. But there is no doubt as to its importance, indeed, its supreme importance in the life of everyone who would follow Christ.

The same may be said of Confirmation. The Apostles began the administration of this sacrament with the very first converts to the Faith. Its appearance as a consistent practice is unexplainable: it was administered “out of the blue” as it were, *unless the Lord Himself taught the Apostles to perform this ministerial act.* Both Baptism and Confirmation—

“the Laying On of hands”—are elementary doctrines of the kingdom of God (Heb. 6: 1, 2). We have seen how St. Peter, in his very first sermon, promised those who repented and were baptized that they would “receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” What is this promise? It was made to the Jews (“you and your children”) and to the gentile nations (“and to all that are afar off”): that God would dwell in the hearts of his people in a New Covenant. The prophet Jeremiah foretold this. He wrote:

*Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more (Jer. 31: 31-34).*

In Confirmation we receive the strengthening gifts of the Holy Spirit that we might continue in the new life we have received at our Baptism. Their practice shows that the Apostles taught this as a necessity for a complete Christian life, *and that it must be had at the imposition of Episcopal hands.* In the earliest days of the Church, Philip the evangelist first preached the Gospel outside of the Jewish domain. He baptized those converted. But he was not an Apostle. He did not have the gift of the Episcopacy, and thus he could not administer the sacrament of Confirmation. The book of Acts, tells the story:

*Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city... when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women... Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8: 5-8, 12, 14-17).*

This is the Apostolic Doctrine concerning Holy Baptism and Confirmation. It remains to find if our Jurisdiction is obedient to the Lord’s teaching. In the Second Office of Instruction (page 290, BCP), we find the following: “Question: When were you made a

member of the Church? Answer: I was made a member of the Church when I was Baptized. Question: What is the Church? Answer: The Church is the Body of which Jesus Christ is the Head, and all baptized people are the members.” A check of the rubrics for holy Baptism in the *Book of Common Prayer* shows that both immersion and sprinkling are allowed—the mode of administration being secondary to the use of water itself as the outward form. In the Order for holy Baptism itself, after the sacrament is performed, the Minister declares to the congregation (page 280 BCP): Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that this Child (or Person) is regenerate, and grafted into the Body of Christ’s Church, let us give thanks unto Almighty God for these benefits; and with one accord make our prayers unto him, that this Child (or this Person) may lead the rest of his life according to this beginning.” *Note that one is Baptized and is thereby a member of the Church—not a denomination or sect or parish—but of the whole Church, the Catholic Church.*

The *Book of Common Prayer* also agrees with our Lord’s doctrine about Confirmation. Again, in the Second Office of Instruction (Page 291, BCP), is the following: Question: What is your bounden duty as a member of the Church? Answer: My bounden duty is to follow Christ, to worship God every Sunday in his Church; and to work and pray and give for the spread of his kingdom. Question: What special means does the Church provide to help you to do all these things? Answer: The Church provides the Laying on of Hands, or Confirmation, wherein, after renewing the promises and vows of my Baptism, and declaring my loyalty and devotion to Christ as my Master, I receive the strengthening gifts of the Holy Spirit.” In the Order of Confirmation, these strengthening gifts are listed as the “manifold gifts of grace: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the spirit of knowledge and true godliness....” The Bishop, after administering the sacrament, prays, “We make our humble supplications unto Thee for these thy servants, upon whom, after the example of Thy holy Apostles, we have now laid our hands, to certify them, by this sign, of Thy favor and gracious goodness towards them.”

The book of Acts records that in the earliest days of the Church, the faithful remained in the Apostles doctrine and fellowship. Let us praise god that He has provided for us a way whereby we also may justly lay claim to remain in that same state.

Let us pray:

O God, eternal Father, who by thy gracious providence hast revealed to us the way of salvation: Grant that we may day by day trust in the power of thy love thus made known to us in Christ Jesus; and so accomplish the perilous journey of this life, that at the last by thy great mercy we may enter into the unending joy of thy heavenly presence; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.