

Dear Friends,

Recently, in looking at the picture of our 31 First Communicants, I was overcome with joy as I counted eleven of the children that I had worked with this year in preparation for Baptism. Eleven. This does not count their siblings, many of whom were also baptized. What a significant thing for them, their parents, and all of us in our parish community... to see the beauty of the sacrament of Baptism received by so many in preparation for First Eucharist.

The sacrament of Baptism is the beginning of life—supernatural life. Because of original sin, the supernatural life is absent from the soul. Original sin is the absence of something that should be there. It is a darkness where there should be light. Jesus instituted the sacrament of Baptism to apply to each individual soul the atonement which He made on the Cross for original sin. Jesus will not force His gift upon us. He holds the gift out to us and each of us must freely accept it. We make that acceptance by receiving the sacrament of Baptism.

When the sacrament of Baptism is administered, original sin disappears as God becomes present in the soul, and the soul is caught up into that sharing of God's own life which we call sanctifying grace. The sacrament of Baptism not only gives us sanctifying grace: it also makes us adopted children of God and heirs of heaven. Sin and its consequences disappear when God comes into the soul, just as darkness disappears when the light is turned on.

Two things happen to us when we are baptized. First, we receive the supernatural life called sanctifying grace. Secondly, a permanent quality is placed on the soul, which we call the mark or the character of Baptism. If we commit mortal sin after Baptism, then we cut ourselves off from God and from the flow of His divine life. We lose sanctifying grace. But we do not lose the baptismal character, by which the soul has been forever transformed.

Since we possess the baptismal character, we have the right to receive the sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation) and regain the grace that we have lost through our individual sins after Baptism. If our soul did not have that character, then we could go to confession a dozen times and nothing would happen. That is true, also, of the other sacraments. None of them can mean a thing to us until first the capacity for receiving the other sacraments has been established in the soul by the character of Baptism. This is because by Baptism, we are given the power—and the obligation—to share with Christ in those things which pertain to divine worship: the Mass and the sacraments.

This serves as a great reminder to us all that it is never too late to say “Yes” to God’s call to share in His sanctifying grace. It is never too late for parents to bring their child to receive this light. May we all have a greater awareness of the gift of Baptism and celebrate the permanent mark on our soul that has forever changed us.

In Christ’s love,  
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