

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, St. Paul writes, **“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”** (Romans 6:1-2)

Christmas is over, but the celebration of the Word made flesh continues throughout the Epiphany season. Today, we remember how Christ fulfilled all righteousness as He was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. There in the water, Christ officially began His holy ministry. There in the water, Christ, who knew no sin, linked Himself to sinners, you and me, so that through His suffering and death, all who would trust in Him would become righteous.

For many people, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism has become a sort of “Get into heaven free card.” St. Mark promises, **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved”** (Mark 16:16a). Likewise, St. Peter writes, **“Baptism now saves you”** (1 Peter 3:21).

So, does the Sacrament of Holy Baptism guarantee a free trip to heaven? Well, yes and no. Jesus inseparably connects Baptism and teaching. For He said, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”** (Matthew 28:18-20).

So, it is the Christian practice ordained by Christ Jesus to baptize and teach. So, Baptism and Confirmation are inseparably linked. And our faith life isn’t complete when we are Confirmed. It has only just begun.

As Christians, we ought not to remain at a surface level in our faith. And it is true that God’s promises in Holy Baptism stand even if we do not believe them. He is always faithful, even when we are faithless. However, all who reject God’s promises and die in unbelief have abandoned their Baptism and do not receive what God has promised.

For the Christians in Rome, many of them acted as if Baptism was indeed a “get into heaven free card”, and many were perfectly satisfied in not growing in the faith. They were content knowing that Christ died for their sins, so they would receive grace upon grace. Enough grace that they could continue living in sin.

Now, Satan knows how to entice human beings. He’s rather good at it. He entices us with the “dangling carrot,” that the more we sin the more God will shower us with His grace. And the Roman Christians were falling for it. And we fall for it. That is the premise for our text. To the Romans and to us, Paul takes up this question: ***“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?”*** (Romans 6:1).

Satan whispers as he tickles our ears saying, “If it makes you feel good, then do it.”

Like the Romans, we, too, can fall into Satan’s trap by saying:

- “I know marriage is *supposed* to be a one-flesh union between one man and one woman, but I guess God’s grace covers that. I don’t want to be insensitive to someone else’s feelings. God is merciful. He surely wouldn’t send someone to hell if he doesn’t repent, would He?”
- “I know sex is *supposed* to be just in marriage, but what if I really love her? We’ll probably get married someday. God is gracious and merciful, isn’t He?”
- “I know pornography is bad, but it makes me feel so good. Doesn’t God want me to be happy?”
- “I know God created humans as male and female, but what if I don’t feel right in my own body. God wants me to be happy, right? And what makes me happy is not wearing pants, but a skirt.”

Now, what’s wrong with this picture? Well, this is Satan’s talking, not God. Satan doesn’t listen to Scripture, and he doesn’t like Scripture and he won’t honor the words of Scripture. He disdains it and tries to get us to question its authenticity and accuracy. When faced with the truth, Satan will try to use it against us. He will twist the Word of God into something unrecognizable to anyone but our old sinful nature – the “Old Adam” in us.

This broken logic is what the fallen, sinful world clings to. To the fallen world, it makes sense that we continue in sin, since grace abounds. Sin is so fun, so how could sinning be wrong? After all, is it still wrong if the government legalizes it? Now, I may be speaking to the choir, but I am sure that there are some among us who believe that it’s no longer sin, if the government declares it to be so.

But what does Scripture say? What does God say? God hates sin. He hates sin, because it's us separating ourselves from Him. We are all poor, miserable sinners, so does God hate us? That's what some would say. But is that really the case? Is it in God's nature to send people to hell? No. But there are many who choose to live in sin than to repent and be forgiven. So, for those people who continue in sin, they only receive what they chose: eternal suffering in hell.

St. Paul says that we can't even think about continuing in sin. Since we have been baptized into Christ, we are dead to all of this nonsense! ***“Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life”*** (Romans 6:1b-4).

In our sinful state, mankind is satisfied to live and function in perverse thinking and doing. But Paul reminds the Roman church that this kind of perverse thinking has no power over us. In Baptism, our sin has been drowned. In Baptism, we have been set free from sin, not because they don't matter, but because Jesus suffered and died for them. In Baptism, we are forgiven because Jesus took all these sins to the cross. Our sins of sexual immorality, our sins of silence when we know others are sinning, our failures to keep our marriage vows, every sin we commit by thought, word, and deed, were nailed to Jesus' cross. Christ died as the eternal sacrifice for our sin.

Therefore, when we repent, that is, when we turn away from sin and to Jesus, we no longer bear the punishment we have earned and deserved. Christ takes those sins to the cross and exchanges them with His forgiveness and righteousness. We are delivered from hell's power and given heaven.

So, what now? How do we as the Church continue to live in this fallen, sinful world? How do we live in this world so that we don't let Satan's usurped authority and power take over our lives? How do we live now since we have ***“died to sin.”*** How do we live now that we have been drowned and buried in Holy Baptism?

Holy Baptism gives us a new life! ***“We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life”*** (Romans 6:4).

As Baptized Christians, our new life is quite different, because the power of God's Word and His Sacraments take over our lives. So, through the Holy Spirit, He leads us to conduct our lives different than that of unbelievers. But this doesn't mean that we will never sin again. You and I will sin, but we don't use God's grace as an excuse to sin. Instead, we receive God's grace each time we repent of our sins as we confess our sins to Him.

So, each time Satan throws his darts at you, each time Satan whispers into your ear, just say this:

*“Satan, hear this proclamation:  
I am baptized into Christ!  
Drop your ugly accusation,  
I am not so soon enticed.  
Now that to the font I've traveled,  
All your might has come unraveled,  
And, against your tyranny,  
God, my Lord, unites with me!”*

*(God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It, LSB 594, stanza 3).*

For us, who, through Holy Baptism, are alive to Christ Jesus, we cannot go back to sin, since you were drowned and buried in Christ, who alone gives you life. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**