

THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

Sacraments are physical experiences that teach and convince us of the truth of the gospel. They are signs of the effects of Jesus' death and resurrection, and they are seals that assure of us that what Jesus did for us is real. Sacraments are also one of the ways that God makes our faith grow stronger, reinforcing our acceptance and understanding of the grace of God.

As a sign, the sacrament of baptism shows us that all our sins are washed away through the blood of Jesus. It shows us that we have been filled with the Holy Spirit, that sin does not control us, and that the Spirit changes us to look and act more and more like Jesus. As a seal, baptism convinces us that these truths are real, as sure as water is wet. Baptism persuades us to see ourselves as heirs of God's promised blessing, that we will receive our inheritance of eternal life in Jesus unless we reject and refuse it.

Baptism also helps to make our faith grow stronger. Baptism reinforces our identity as members of God's family, Christ's body, the Church. Baptism convinces us that we are marked with the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In baptism, God is speaking. For adults, God communicates that He has done and will do everything necessary for the adult to come to faith in Christ and to continue to grow in that faith. For babies, God promises to give that child everything that he or she will need to come to the moment when they know and believe that Jesus died and rose again for them and are willing to surrender their lives to Him. God keeps that promise by providing believing parents to the child, as well as the Church, to help the baby grow in faith.

As a result of God's promises in baptism, we look forward with anticipation, expecting the moment when the child will be old enough to publicly declare that they have repented and believed in our Lord Jesus.

Christ is present with us in this sacrament. It is He Himself who baptizes us, and by the Spirit of Pentecost He brings us into His church. In baptism, God claims us and seals us to show that we belong to God.

By water and the Holy Spirit, we are made members of the church, the body of Christ, and joined to Christ's ministry of love, peace, and justice. In this sacrament, the love of God is offered to each one of us. Though we cannot fully understand it or explain it, we are called to accept that love with the openness and trust of a child.