

Romans 6:1-11

It doesn't take very long. A few words are spoken. Some things are done with the hands. And then it's finished. But what was done in those few minutes is life-changing. There is a sharp break with the past. From now on everything will be new and different. What is this thing we're talking about? It's marriage. A ceremony, a rite which takes place in a moment in time, but once it happens, the lives of the persons involved are forever changed. Now there is commitment, a promise, an oath to keep. Now there is being responsible for someone beside yourself. There is love and intimacy. And there are up's and down's. Those who become married do not have a life free from troubles. In fact marriage brings its own troubles with it. But it also brings many joys and much happiness.

We could actually say that marriage is a little like, or maybe even a lot like baptism. Baptism is not an escape from troubles either. In fact baptism brings with it many troubles and hardships all its own that the unbaptized never deal with. Just like Muslim terrorists do not plot against those who are loyal to them, but they plot against Americans and others in the free world, so Satan and his evil angels target especially those who are baptized into Christ. They plot, not against those who care nothing for Christ, but against you who have been washed in the blood of Jesus. They make sure that you, the baptized, do not live without problems. Satan wants to plague you so much that you wonder whether it's really worth it to be a follower of Jesus. He's hoping for a divorce; to separate you from Christ. And he often has great success. While fifty out of a hundred marriages ends in divorce, less than twenty-five out of a hundred who have been joined to Christ in Holy Baptism remain faithful to Him unto death.

But friends it is worth it to live as one plagued by the devil; to live the life of a Christian no matter what difficulties we endure. When people become married they do not say, "We'll see how it goes, but we'll leave the door open in case it doesn't work out." They promise, "For better or for worse...till death do us part." When Jesus entered into the waters of the Jordan River He did not look back. He was plunged into those waters so that in your baptism He would be joined intimately with you. Jesus committed so completely to you so that in your baptism you would be united with Him and commit yourself to Him.

But there are many times in our life when it's difficult to see that commitment in us. There are days when we live not like those baptized into Christ, but like the unbaptized; like those who have no connection to Him. We don't think much, do we, of married people who live as if they were single; who, even though they promised to be faithful to their spouse, seek and find other men or women. We do not hold these cheaters in high regard. And yet we do the very same thing! In your baptism the words which were spoken, the water that was sprinkled made you the spouse of Christ...His beloved bride. You and I gave our word, a promise, an oath to be faithful to Him unto death for better or for worse. Have you kept your word? Do you always seek first in your life His Kingdom and Righteousness? Do you always love Him above all things? Is Christ placed ahead of family, job, hobbies? Do you give Him the first of your income? Do you make the time for His words to be read, studied, and heard?

We, too, have cheated on our Divine Spouse. We have lived as if we were single persons and not married in baptism to Christ our Lord. If Jesus was only like us, a mere mortal, our days of being joined to Him would be over. How often does a spouse forgive and take back his cheating partner? No spouse would put up with us if we treated him or her the way we have treated our God.

But St. Paul assures us that God is not like us. He is full of mercy, of forgiveness, of love. Just prior to our Epistle text, in Romans 5, he writes these words, "Where sin increased, grace abounded even more." Simply put, God's mercy is greater than your sins. Jesus is the Spouse who never stops forgiving.

This may seem foolish. Why would a husband or wife keep taking their cheating partner back over and over and over? The hurt, the emotional pain would be too much. But God was willing to suffer the pain, the unbearable hurt. He went to the cross and took your shame. He became clothed in our adulterous rags. He endured the punishment for our cheating ways. Friends, Jesus has so completely forgiven you that in His eyes you are clean of every sin. There is no spot, or guilt, or stain anywhere in you. His blood cleanses you of all sins.

And that right there is what gives us the desire, the motivation, the strength to live as His baptized people. Baptism goes beyond marriage. When a couple becomes married no special power is given them to help them live faithfully with each other. But baptism does give such a power. When you were baptized, God put His Spirit within you. Christ came to live in you with His grace and strength to help you live as His Christian. This is what Romans 6 is all about. Once baptized, we are not left to fend for ourselves against sin, death, and Satan. Your baptism joins you to Jesus. Now He is for you and in you. His life is your life. His strength is your strength. Now you can resist the temptations to sin because Jesus, who is in you, has set you free from the power of sin in your life. Now you can tell Satan, "Get behind me!" because Jesus, not the devil, is your Master. Now you have no fear of death because as Jesus died and rose again, so you who are joined to Him in baptism, daily rise with Him through repentance, and will live forever with Him in heaven.

How can baptism do such great things? Because baptism is God's work, not ours. As God led His people out of Egypt's slavery through their baptism in the Red Sea, as He gave new life to Naaman cleansing his leprosy in his baptism in the Jordan's waters, so God is at work in you through your baptism into Christ. It took only a few minutes. Some words were spoken. Some water was sprinkled with the hands. But that event in your life marks you as one for whom Christ died; as one upon whom God has poured forth His Spirit; as a new creation in Jesus, forgiven, redeemed, and loved by God.

Hold on to your baptism. And by this I mean hold on to the words of Jesus. Hold on to His Sacrament of the Altar. Hold on to His absolution given to you through your pastor. Because in all these holy things it is Jesus who keeps holding on to you, His beloved bride. Amen.