

## Luke 2:21

Even if we do not use pen and paper to jot down some New Year's resolutions, we're probably at least thinking of some things we'd like to work on in the coming year. Diet and exercise top the list for most people. Many resolve to put more money into savings. Some resolve to stop smoking and to drink less alcohol. And there may be the person who resolves to read the Bible more, attend worship more frequently, and even join a Bible Class.

The problem with New Years' resolutions, be they physical or spiritual, is that we human beings are pathetic. We're weak. We give up easily. And we justify our actions when we don't follow through. We're the opposite of God. He always follows through. There is no flaw in His entire being. He doesn't need to gear up and resolve to do better in the future. God cannot improve in any way, but we can in every way. There isn't one of us who is where we should be in any part of our life.

But we're not going to get to where we should be by trying harder. Someone once wisely said, "The harder I try to get ahead, the more behind I get." The Apostle Paul said something similar to this in referring to his life as a Christian: "The good I want to do, I don't do it; but the evil I don't want to do, that's what I do."

St. Paul needed more than a New Year's resolution to improve as a Christian; and so do we. We need the words of our text: "*And at the end of eight days, when He was circumcised, He was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.*" Just one verse in the Bible, but these words have great power for us. Today is not merely January 1, the beginning of a new year; today is the 8th Day, the beginning of a new life for us. The first day of creation was a Sunday. Monday was the second day of creation, and so on. God made man on the sixth day, a Friday, and on the seventh day He rested.

But what happened to God's perfect creation? It fell into sin. And there is nothing we can do to fix it. This is why New Year's resolutions do not succeed. They are made by imperfect people. We can try to improve, but we always fall short. If we rely on our inner drive, our self-determination, we may make a few temporary changes with regard to our health and finances, but in that part of our life where it counts the most - how we live before God - we fail to follow through on a daily basis.

And so we say to ourselves, "I'm fine just the way I am. I don't need to improve as a Christian in how I live before God, in my worship attendance, in my Bible reading, in my offerings to the Lord." We've learned to accept ourselves the way we are, and we assume that God does, too. But if we do not, as God's people, resolve to do better, then we are deceiving ourselves; we are denying the power of our Baptism; we have no business approaching God's altar to receive His Sacrament; rather, we have turned away from Christ and become one with our fallen world, and unless we repent, we will perish along with it.

To repent is not to embrace ourselves the way we are and figure that we're good enough. Rather, it's the desire to amend our sinful life and resolve to improve. The first world that God created in six days, because it fell into sin, is not good enough. God has a new world in store for us. And to be a part of this new creation, we must put off our sinful self and the ways of our past.

Today is the day to do this. Not because it's January 1, but because it's the 8th day. Jesus was circumcised on the 8th day. As an eight-day-old baby, His blood was shed; it was shed for you. In circumcision there is a cutting away of a part of the body, and this involves pain and suffering. Jesus, when He was eight days old, felt this pain and suffering for you. As the Holy Child of God, Jesus had no part of His body which needed to be cut off. He was perfect; every part of Him was. But you and I have much that needs to be cut away. Our hearts, along with all we are, are full of evil.

The solution is not to go to our doctor and become circumcised. It's to be united to Jesus who was circumcised for us all. This union takes place through Holy Baptism. "*As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ,*" says our Epistle, "*you are all one in Christ Jesus.*" Your Baptism is not merely an event in your past. It is that, but so much more. Because you are baptized, every Sunday is the 8th day for you. Last week, with all its sinfulness, is cut away as you here are reunited to Christ Jesus. His tiny drops of blood are more than enough to sprinkle your life clean of sin.

On the 8th day Jesus was circumcised, says our text. Our Lord ushered in the new creation. In Christ, the old sinful self is put off. In Christ, there is mercy, grace, forgiveness. But we cannot live in the old and yet have the new as well. We cannot embrace the sins of our flesh and also embrace Christ. We cannot call ourselves Christians while refusing to live as Christians. It's one thing to not make New Year's resolutions because we never follow through anyway, but to have no desire to improve as God's people - by accepting our old sinful ways, and not striving to be rid of them - is to miss the point of what it means to live as God's new creation in Christ.

The new year begins today on January 1, but even better, your life begins anew today, the 8th day, because Jesus is here for you, and His blood wipes away your past sins, all of them. Today you return to your Baptism into Christ. Today you are given His blood - even one drop, one sip, cleanses everything evil and sinful within you. Today God sees you in Christ as His new creation. He declares you forgiven. He does not recall to mind your former sins. Jesus was circumcised for you. This was a preview of what was to come - nails and spear; the cross He bore for me and you. In Christ the old is cut away. There is now for you only grace and every blessing.

Because you believe this, here is what you will do...you and I will desire to amend our sinful lives; we will resolve to follow God's will and not our own; and we will admit defeat - that we cannot, by our own strength, follow through with this. But we will turn to Christ and seek Him. Every 8th day He is here for you with forgiveness for your sins of the past week, with power to live as God's new creation. And so because we are His, we resolve to be here with Him who is here for us. We resolve to study His Word more than we have in the past. Can we not encourage each other in these things? Where one of us is strong, another of us is weak; and where one is weak, another is strong. We need each other. God strengthens us through each other.

The new year is here, but even more, the new life is here for you in Christ. The name of Jesus is the name you bear. This is the 8th day. You can live as God's new creation, His forgiven one, because this is who you are in Jesus. Amen.