

Romans 6:1-11

It was at a Men's Bible Breakfast, in nearby St. Louis, where he shared his story. His father had been an alcoholic. It was rare for him to see his father without a drink in his hand. It finally took his life. And when he gazed at his father in the coffin, it dawned on him - a sudden realization - that for the first time, his dad was no longer under the power of alcohol because he had died. This, the man shared, is surely what St. Paul means when he says that we have died to sin. Just as the bottle could not control his father after he died, so with us, sin cannot control us who have died with Christ in our baptism.

The man was right. St. Paul uses the analogy of death in Romans 6, and this is something we all understand. In death there is separation; total and complete. Body and soul separate. Unless they do, there is no death. Death comes the moment they separate. While we live, we are affected by the things within our world: cold and heat, politics, sports; we experience joy and sorrow, triumph and defeat. The things which surround us in our world, be they bad or good, control us to some degree. But when a person dies, because his body is now separate from his soul, nothing which happens here on earth affects that person ever again. And so nothing here can ever again control the person once he has died.

In your baptism, says the apostle, you died. When you were brought to the waters in the font, you were, in a sense, placed into a coffin; not by yourself, however; you were placed into the coffin with Jesus. You died and were buried with Him. Death is separation. When you were baptized, something within you was separated. Not your body from your soul; that will come in time when you die physically. You were separated from the rule of sin over you. You did not cease to be a sinner after you were baptized, but because you died to sin in those waters, its power over you was brought to nothing.

How then, asks the Apostle Paul, would we ever yield to sin since it no longer controls us? A person who has died, whose body is lying in a coffin, cannot be tempted by the allurements of the world. A dead person simply will not give any attention to sinful enticements because he is dead. That man, whose father had died, could have held an open bottle of beer to him in his coffin, and he would have made no movement whatsoever to drink it. So how is it possible for us, who have died to sin our baptism, to allow sin to control us? It's not possible. Unless we don't believe.

"Consider yourselves," says Paul, *"dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."* We must truly believe that in our baptism we really did die to sin. But we're like the chicken running around the yard with its head cut off. It refuses to believe that it's dead. We're like that chicken when we run around from one temptation to another, letting sin after sin overpower us and control us. We're cut off from sin; it's no longer our head and master. Jesus is, for we have risen with Him in our baptism. But this must be believed. And then we can live it day after day. If it's not believed, then we will yield to sin. We will let our anger get the best of us. We will give in to our lust. We will continue to disobey our parents. Wherever sin entices us, we will not master it, but permit it to master us.

This is how unbelievers live. They do not desire to live holy lives. They do not live as people who have died to sin and risen with Christ. If we live like them, we live as if we were never baptized; as if it means nothing to us. But you are baptized. When sin entices you, wanting to control you, you can tell it to take a hike; that you belong to Jesus, for you are baptized into His death and resurrection.

Today we celebrate His baptism in the Jordan River. Those waters picked Him up and carried Him all the way to Calvary. When Jesus put His feet into the Jordan, they were destined to be nailed to a cross, but then to walk away from the tomb on the third day. All three events in His life are bound together: baptism, death, and resurrection. And in your baptism, you join Jesus in all these events: in the water, in His death, and in His resurrection.

And here's the beauty in this...because you died with Christ in your baptism, your next death cannot truly hurt you. When your body and soul separate, as they will one day, that death will be merely a rest in the ground. Why? Because you already died to sin in your baptism. No one can die more than once. Since you already died with Christ in baptism, the separation of your body and soul one day will be but the gate of heaven for you - the day of life more than the day of your death.

"Consider yourselves," says Paul, *"dead to sin..."* But we don't consider this very often, do we? We consider everything that happens in the world around us. But to consider our baptism day by day is something very few do.

Then do this: begin each day making the sign of the holy cross over your heart, with the words, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Remind yourself daily: I am baptized into Christ! In the Star Wars series, those who are on the side of good say to each other, "May the force be with you." In the latest movie, which came out last month, a young Jedi warrior would, at least once a day, say to himself: I am one with the force; the force is one with me.

What they do in Star Wars as make-believe, we do for real. Not the force, but Jesus is one with us. *"May the Lord be with you,"* are the words you hear. We greet each other with *"The peace of the Lord be with you."* And because we are baptized, we can truly say: I am one with Jesus, and He is one with me. In baptism, we are intimately united with, and joined to, Christ.

This is not something you can see with your eyes; it is believed in the heart. And to believe it is to believe in Jesus. To believe that I have died and risen with Christ in my baptism is to believe that Jesus died and rose again for me. And believing thusly, is to consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Sin is not your master, yet sin still dwells within us. And so you come here each Sunday for the forgiveness of your sins. God forgives you. And this forgiveness is declared and given to you by His word into your ears, and by His body and blood into your mouth. Because you physically sin with your body, you need forgiveness that is real, and given through these physical means.

Your baptism, too, is very real, and it's time that we begin to see it that way. I wish that all of us would begin each day with the sign of the cross and the words placed upon us in our baptism: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." And then end each day in the same manner. In this way, we are claiming the forgiveness of sins which Jesus purchased for us by His blood. We begin and end each day in God's grace. We begin in the forgiveness our baptism gives us, and we end as sinners forgiven for the sins of that day through Christ in our baptism.

"Consider yourselves (in this way)," says the Apostle Paul. Believing and living in our baptism into Christ in this way, sin cannot gain power over us, but we will be alive to God in Christ Jesus. Amen.