

Mark 1:9-11

Anyone who comes from a large family knows that years ago bath time was a highlight of the week. Saturday evening when the chores were done the tub was filled with water. And for families who lived during the depression years and were raised on farms, the tub was not drained and refilled after each bath. Each member of the family took their turn, and it was the lucky ones who were at the front of the line. For the last youngsters had to climb into a tub full of dirty water.

As difficult a task as that may have been, it cannot compare to what Jesus did when He was baptized. St. Mark writes, "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan." (Mark 1:9) As our Brother, Jesus climbed first into the water, not to avoid the dirt and filth, but to make it clean for us.

"He who had no sin became sin for us," writes St. Paul, "that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21) Jesus entered the Jordan to be baptized, not to be cleansed of sin, for He had no sin; He entered the water for our sake. As He climbed down into the water, it was like climbing into a sewer. The water was full of the most disgusting filth imaginable. It was filled with our wretched sins. It stank of our guilt. There wasn't one molecule that was clean. It was, all of it, putrid. But He climbed down into it freely, willingly. And after His baptism as He climbed back out of the water, amazingly, the water was pure, sparkling clean, because all the filth now covered Jesus. He entered the water pure and holy, without sin and blemish. He left the water, "the Sinner," for He became covered with our sin. There wasn't one sin left in the water. He took it all. It was all charged to Him. Every disgusting, wretched thought, word, and deed of ours, He took upon Himself when He was baptized.

Why? So that you and I can approach the waters of baptism and be made holy in the eyes of God. It works just the opposite of family bath time on the farm. There, no one wanted to bathe last. Everyone wanted to go first. But with our spiritual bath of baptism, Jesus bathed first so that all who follow Him into the waters are cleansed of every sin.

This means, friend, that baptized into Christ Jesus, heaven is open to you. St. Mark writes that Jesus, "coming up out of the water saw the heavens opening." (Mark 1:10) The Greek word here pictures this opening as being very violent. This is not a simple, easy opening of a door. This is a ripping, a tearing apart. The same picture is given when the great temple curtain was ripped apart when Jesus died on the cross. It was not easily unzipped. It was torn in two from top to bottom.

How interesting that this violent ripping takes place both when Jesus enters the waters for you, and when He dies for you. Winning your salvation was not an easy task. Our sins had sealed heaven up tight. Heaven was closed to every one of us for we have rebelled against the God of heaven. But Jesus, with His baptism, life, sufferings, and death for you ripped your sins away and opens heaven to you.

And how do you enter? Through the bath of your baptism. The heavens opened when Jesus was baptized so that, in your baptism you gain entrance into heaven. Years ago baths were taken just once a week for many families—on Saturday evening, after the week's

work was done and before church on Sunday morning. So with us. To enter God's presence both here and in heaven, our spiritual bath of baptism is necessary.

Doing the chores on the farm day after day did not make the farm kids clean. It made them dirty. The bath is what made them clean. The works we do as God's children do not make us clean. "All our good deeds are but filthy rags," writes the Prophet. (Isaiah 64:6) It is our bath alone that makes us clean. Jesus cleanses us of our sin. In Holy Baptism Jesus brings you to His Heavenly Father. He presents you to Him as a sinless child of His, pure and spotless.

It is not accidental that the baptismal font is located where it is here in church, for it is a reminder to you that God receives you for Jesus' sake because you are baptized into Christ. As you enter God's presence here, the font declares to you that you may enter without fear, for in Holy Baptism you are cleansed of every rebellious act against God. As you come up to the altar to receive the Lord's body and blood for you, the font declares to you that you are welcomed by your Savior not because of your works for Him, but because He bathed you there.

We walk by the font often, don't we? And we do so without thinking. Instead of letting the font remind us that we are God's forgiven children in Christ, it becomes just a piece of furniture that gets in our way. And isn't that also true with what happened there? We're often like some kids on the farm who saw their bath as a hindrance. It meant playtime was over. No more frolicking in the mud. Bath time meant that the fun was done.

We live like that today. We not only ignore the meaning of the font, we live as though our bath there never happened. We enjoy our sins too much to give them up. We want to keep playing in the mud. We enjoy gossiping about our neighbor. We don't want to give up our grudge. We enjoy sexual promiscuity. We like to be our own god and make up our own rules for living. So often you and I live as though we never were baptized. We live as if Jesus never cleansed us of our sin. It's often very difficult to tell us, the baptized children of God, apart from those who are not God's baptized children.

Repent! Jesus did not wash you clean of your sins so you can go lie in the mud with your neighbor's spouse. He did not sanctify your body and soul so you can live for yourself. Jesus did not forgive you all your sins so you can refuse to forgive your neighbor who sins against you. He did not bathe you within these hallowed walls so you can stay at home on Sunday mornings and do your own thing.

Isn't it true that we live as though our baptism really...changed nothing? But friend, it changed everything! It changed how God looks at you. You are not covered with sin—you are now covered with Christ. You are not a gossip, an adulterer, a liar—you are forgiven. Your baptism means that, in God's eyes, you have kept perfectly, each and every commandment, because Christ kept them for you. Your baptism means that no matter how sinful you are, no matter how far you have strayed from God's House, no matter how undeserving you may be, Jesus gives you heaven. Your baptism means that Christ, who was baptized for you, who lived, suffered, died, and rose again for you, now lives within you, and He enables you to live a life pleasing to God. Your baptism means that when you leave this House today you have no fear of Satan, no fear of death, no fear of hell, because you belong to Jesus Christ who defeated these enemies for you.

What does your baptism mean? It means that Jesus entered the Jordan's sinful waters so that you may know who you are—God's child, and that you may live without fear in His presence now and forever. Amen.