HOMILY FOR 13TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME June 28, 2020

What are the most significant days in your lifetime? Graduation, your wedding, the birth of a child? What about the day you died? What, when did I die? Just listen to St. Paul in our second reading: “Brothers and sisters, are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”

I think most of us ARE unaware of that...of the power of what really happens in Baptism.

Sacraments are real, powerful, and living encounters with the Risen Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit they actually change us, if we’re open to it. Most of us were baptized as babies, a great gift from our parents. We weren’t able to resist it. Eventually, we have to choose to live it or reject it...a choice we have to make each day, probably several times a day. If you were baptized later, we would assume you were open to it. Still, you have to choose each day if you will embrace this great gift.

What is that gift? Listen to the rest of what Paul has to say: “We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him.”

Let’s unpack that a little bit. First, it says we were baptized into His death “so that...we might live in newness of life.” What’s new about life in Christ? First of all, a new relationship with God, who took on our human nature so powerfully that we’re supposed to see Him in each other! Christ united Himself with us so completely that He’s able to say in today’s Gospel, “Whoever receives you receives me.” He took on our nature so completely that His dying and rising can become our dying and rising. His victory can become our victory.

We’re coming up on the 4th of July in a few days, a time to celebrate our freedom. Life in Christ brings true freedom which cannot be taken away. How is that? Christ brings a new approach toward one another: love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, turn the other cheek, forgive and forgive and forgive. This leads us to freedom, because hatred and resentment will bind our hearts, blur our vision, and give others power over us.

Christ offers a new approach to wealth and possessions: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” That doesn’t mean you have to literally be poor, but to know that our true treasure lies in things we cannot lose. Jesus also said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.” Not because wealthy people are bad, but because it’s so easy to rely on material things. And, compared to much of the world, all of us are wealthy. So we need this new vision, so that our possessions don’t possess us and become obstacles to our freedom.

Paul goes on to talk about the greatest freedom that we have in Christ: “If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him.” Being baptized into His victor over death means that death no longer has power over us either! What greater freedom can there be?

Freedom from the power of death means we have little to fear. So it’s a victory we enjoy here and now. And it’s not just about our own death. One of the greatest fears people have is the death of a loved one. My mother buried three of her children, yet she lived a life of joy and hope. I lost my dad when I was fifteen. That was a time I truly discovered the gift that my parents had given me in Baptism, a gift that they nurtured by raising me in the practice of the faith. So, when confronted by the greatest challenge of my life, I discovered that I already had the greatest gift I could ever want. It was a great loss, but it didn’t ruin my life. In the end, death had no power over me.

This “newness of life” only begins with Baptism. It’s maintained and strengthened by the other sacraments, especially Reconciliation and Eucharist. Christ not only offers us freedom from death, but also freedom from sin. And the two are related. Sin is a kind of spiritual death, because it separates us from our ultimate source of life. Some sins are called “mortal” because they risk us being totally cut off from His divine life. But even though we freely choose to sin, Christ gave His Church this beautiful gift of Reconciliation when He said to the apostles, “whose sins you forgive are forgiven them.”

So many of us know the powerful words of absolution, “Through the ministry of the Church, may God give you pardon and peace.” If you haven’t heard those words in a while, we’re right here three times a week, or any time by appointment. What a great sense of peace, to know that we’re totally restored to that “newness of life” we received in our Baptism.

But the primary way we strengthen that divine life is by gathering at this table. We’re once again immersed in His death and resurrection. We not only receive the Risen Lord, we also participate in His self-offering which gives us new life. And, if we allow it, we grow more and more in His likeness, so that we may live in the freedom of the children of God.

So now, none of us are unaware: we were baptized into His death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too might live in newness of life. What might that look like in your life?