

# DECEMBER 3, 2023: 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT



Last week we traveled down Church Street, ran into some roadwork, and made it onto U Drive. This journey helped us see the importance of baptism in our relationship with others and creation, which opened us to examining our relationship with self. The heart of our relationship with others is that we are entered into a community by baptism. Our nature, which is made in the image and likeness of God, shows us that we are intended to be social beings since God is a community within himself. So, God provided the context for us to truly live out our need for community by creating the Church, and through baptism we are accepted into that Church. In that community we serve a com-

mon purpose of living a life of holiness and continuing the mission of Christ. We then hit some roadwork and realized that creation is also an important relationship for us. We are called *not* to be owners but to be stewards of God's creation. We discover God in and through his creation and use that creation only as He intends it to be used. As we moved past the roadwork we turned onto U Drive. Here we began to explore our relationship with ourselves. The heart of traveling on this road was to discover that we are a new creation, centered on salvation and holiness which leads to a life of service. This helps us begin to discover the meaning of our lives. And so we continue the journey by turning onto Mission Avenue.

Baptism becomes the primary vocation of our lives by defining how our relationships are intended to be lived out. The foundation of these relationships is built upon Christ's unconditional love, through which we define our lives as one of continual repentance and conversion. Baptism removes original sin and any other sins we may have committed but, unfortunately, we retain what Augustine called concupiscence—our desire for sin. We will, in our lives, fall back into sin and most of us will create a pattern of sin. We need God's grace and mercy to overcome both the sin and the desire to sin. Baptism gives us the grace to do that and opens for us the other sacraments, which will support the grace received in baptism. Filled with the Holy Spirit we live our lives in faith and that faith calls forth from us a desire to grow in our relationship with Christ. We are therefore on a journey of always seeking to deepen our conversion to Christ, and so we repent whenever we choose other than God's way. Baptism helps us to realize that we are never without hope: our God sent Jesus to us for one purpose—to lead us to salvation. This is possible only when our lives are truly rooted in the Paschal Mystery. The saving actions of Christ show us God's unconditional love for us. It also helps us realize that our God does not simply love us but has fallen in love with us, and desires us to have a truly intimate relationship with Him, one where we come to fall in love with God. This all becomes possible through baptism because it calls us each day to seek that deepening conversion to Christ.

As we travel on to our destination, we must recognize some truths. Christianity is unlike any other faith because you can never be born a Christian. Being born of Christian parents does *not* make you a Christian. One becomes a Christian only through being baptized. It is baptism that recreates us into the reality of who we are called to be—a people in union with the living God. The word baptism comes from the Greek *baptizien*, which means to be immersed, and it is both an apt description of what physically occurs in the sacrament and what happens in our lives with Christ. This wondrous gift given to us by Christ is intended to define the life that we will live and how we are called to live it. Baptism immerses us in Christ by uniting us to his death and resurrection. Christian life is not about following some rules; rather, it is ultimately about growing in proper relationships. Hence, when Baptism is our GPS and we follow the directions, we will be open to the grace necessary to follow Christ. This helps us to live the life of one saved in, by, and through Christ, and we come to realize that heaven is not so much about A place as it is about the relationships God calls us to.

Heaven is not earned, merited, or deserved. Rather, it is realized here and now by truly embracing the life that baptism calls us to lead.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to call/text me at (978) 254-0560. If you prefer to email, please visit <https://theholyrood.org/email-fr-brian>.

Please keep me in your prayers.