August 4, 2019 A New Garment Homily: From the point of view of G.K. Chesterton, one of England's most noteworthy writers of the first half of the last century, there is more wisdom to be found in traditional fairy tales than in many of the then current works of philosophy and theology. Take, for instance, the well known tale of Cinderella. It is not simply a rags-to-riches story; it is a profound reflection on one young girl's transformation and her assuming a new life while leaving her old life behind her. As the story unfolds, we learn that Cinderella is badly mistreated by members of her step-family. She spends her days sweeping floors and emptying the fireplace of soot and ashes. Her life is one of drudgery and tedium. Unexpectedly, her fairy Godmother appears and gives her a beautiful gown to wear at a ball hosted by the royal family. Her beauty outshines that of every other guest, and captures the attention of the handsome prince. After Cinderella goes missing, the prince tracks her down. Of course, the story ends on a joyful note. Cinderella and her prince live happily ever after.

A Broadway musical and a later film adaptation, "My Fair Lady", which is based on the play, "Pygmalion", by George Bernard Shaw, have cleverly adopted the basic theme of the fairy tale. Under the influence of her muse, Professor Henry Higgins, the one-time impoverished peddler of flowers, Eliza Doolittle, is dramatically transformed into a "Lady". The splendid gown worn by Eliza at the ball attended by members of High Society, symbolizes her new identity as a woman of charm and grace.

Clearly, what St. Paul has in mind in today's second reading (Col.3:1-5, 9-11) is baptism and the new life of the Christian. One of the most popular images in Paul's writing is to be clothed with Christ. "Everyone who has been baptized has been clothed with Christ." St. Paul writes of a total transformation. "Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold new things have come." (2 Cor.5:17) The death and Resurrection of Christ makes it possible for all people to die to an old world in order to be born to a new one through their participation in the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus. In his letter to the Colossians, he reminds them that they "have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self". (Col.3:10) The newly baptized have "taken off" the old clothing of paganism and been clothed in a new, radiant garment. He warns them that the old clothing must not be put on again. They must not return to their former way of life. The old clothing must be discarded. They must refrain from "immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and the greed that is idolatry". (Col. 3:6) The new Christian must never trade in the new garment for an old one. One's new self, borne of baptismal grace, allows him to live in a manner worthy of the Lord.

The late Fr. Henri Nouwen, a Dutch priest and author of several acclaimed books on Christian spirituality, writes, "Being a believer means being clothed with Christ. This is much more than wearing a cloak. It refers to a total transformation that allows us to say with St. Paul: I have been crucified with Christ and yet I live, it is no longer I, but Christ living in me".

On the day of our baptism, we were clothed in a new garment. Recall the prayer from the baptismal rite: "N., you have become a new creation and have clothed yourself with Christ. See in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity. With your family and friends to help you by word and example, bring that dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven".

It is noteworthy that in the Book of Revelation, the last book of the bible, the seer has a vision of the elect in heaven. They are clothed in white garments. It is the attire of those who have witnessed to Christ and have now claimed their heavenly reward.

May we never trade in our baptismal garment for the rags of our former sinful life, a life dominated by ignorance, sinful behavior and religious indifference!

Amen!