

Baptism: To be “plunged into the Paschal Mystery” (SC 6)

By Biagio Mazza

As we prepare to celebrate the heart of the liturgical year, the Easter Triduum, it is important to remind ourselves of the meaning and significance of our baptismal call. The catechumens who will be fully initiated at the Easter Vigil vividly invite us all to recall our own baptism. As they are “plunged” into the life-giving waters, they challenge us to renew our own baptism, and what it signifies.

Sacrosanctum Concilium, Vatican II’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, restored a good bit of the church’s liturgical tradition which had been either selectively forgotten or progressively distorted over time. The meaning and significance of baptism as the act of becoming a “new creation” in Christ had progressively become a sacrament whose primary purpose was the removal of original sin. Demanding that baptism be performed “as soon as possible” after birth so as to wipe out original sin detached baptism from much of its biblical roots and relevance. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* did much to restore the value, meaning and significance of baptism, grounding it in the Paschal Mystery of Christ (SC #6) which we recall, re-enact and celebrate every time the church, the people of God, engage in liturgical celebrations.

Full, conscious and active participation by all at every liturgical celebration is demanded by the very nature of baptism (SC #14). If at baptism we are “plunged” or “implanted” into the Paschal Mystery (SC #6), taking Christ’s life, passion, death and resurrection as the template for our lives, then every time we recall, re-enact and celebrate the Paschal Mystery, we are all called to be actively involved. The council’s retrieval of this rich biblical understanding of baptism elevated the sacrament’s meaning and significance for all Christians.

SC #48 clearly states that at every Eucharistic celebration “Christian believers should not be there as strangers or silent spectators...they should take part in the sacred action actively, fully aware and devoutly....Offering the immaculate victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him....” This radically new affirmation of the “common priesthood of all the faithful” is strongly affirmed in The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* #34 when it asserts that “in the celebration of the Eucharist these (the daily works of the laity) are offered to the father in all piety along with the body of the Lord. And so,

worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity *consecrate* (italics added) the world itself to God.”

It should then come as no surprise that all who participate at the liturgy are “celebrants” led in their celebration by a “presider.” All celebrate the Eucharist together calling upon God to change and transform us in the same manner in which bread and wine are transformed into Christ’s body and blood through the Spirit’s action.

One of the most significant restorations that *Sacrosanctum Concilium* initiated was the grounding of ministry not in ordination, as it had been commonly understood, but in baptism. Being “plunged” into the Paschal Mystery demands that every baptized Christian take on the mind and heart of Jesus. In so doing, we model ourselves on Jesus, who gave of himself for us, so that we might do the same for one another. Our gifts, freely given by the Spirit, are to be utilized in carrying on the mission and ministry of Jesus.

In and through our baptismal call and commitment, ministry becomes not a privilege but an obligation of all the baptized. All are called to ministry as well as discernment, the process needed to ascertain how best to use our gifts in service to others, thus living out the Paschal Mystery in all our daily works and encounters. Baptism demands that in all we do, we are called to make real Christ’s pattern of dying and rising, always being willing to give of ourselves for others the way Christ gave of himself for us.

In baptism we are made a new creation, meaning that we are re-made into the pattern of the risen Christ. We join a community that has committed itself to this new way of living modeled on the risen Christ. Every Sunday we gather to celebrate that new life we have received in Christ. Whenever we treat others with justice, human dignity and respect, whenever we forgive, reconcile, and work at restoring peace, whenever we work for justice and healing, whenever we care for the stranger, the foreigner, the oppressed and the outcast, we are making real this new creation as baptized children of God. We are establishing and building up God’s reign here and now.

This Easter Vigil, renew your baptismal promises with greater meaning and depth, thanking God for the new creation we have become in the Risen Christ.