

Ezekiel sees water flowing out of the temple toward the east. “The life and refreshment produced wherever the Temple stream flows evoke the order and abundance of paradise and represent the coming transformation Ezekiel envisions for the exiles and their land” (note Ez 47:1-12). As Christians, the same imagery evokes thoughts of the life-giving waters of Baptism. Jesus’ body is the Temple of the New Covenant. When Jesus died on the cross for our salvation, a soldier pierced his side with a lance and blood and water flowed from the side of Jesus, from the side of the Temple. While the blood<sup>i</sup> points us to the Eucharist, the water points us to Baptism.

Water is a rich symbol for the sacrament of Baptism. We know at the outset of Jesus’ ministry Jesus was baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist. “To make holy the flowing waters, [John] baptized the very author of Baptism.”<sup>ii</sup> Before his ascension into heaven, Jesus commanded the apostles: “Go . . . and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age” (Mt 19:20). It is with water that God “purifies unceasingly by his merciful forgiveness those [He] once cleansed in the waters of Baptism.”<sup>iii</sup>

Ezekiel speaks of water that flows out of the temple into the river and then on into the sea. Wherever the water flows, there is new life. Trees grow along the banks of the river and the salt water is made fresh. With Baptism, “immersion in water is a sign of death, and emersion out of the water means new life.”<sup>iv</sup> There is a death to sin, but a rising to new life in Christ.

In the Gospel of John, we have similar life-giving imagery with the healing pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. The crippled man has come to bathe in water and to undergo a cleansing that he hopes will offer healing. “Apparently an intermittent spring in the pool bubbled up occasionally (see Jn 5:3). This turbulence was believed to cure.” The crippled man pleads his case to Jesus because with his infirmities he can never get in the intermittently curing water before others. Jesus tells the man to “‘Rise, take up your mat, and walk.’ Immediately the man became well, took up his mat, and walked” (Jn 5:8). And Jesus commands him to sin no more. All human beings “need to die to themselves to do God’s will.”<sup>v</sup>

“By commanding his disciples to baptize all nations, [Jesus] established the means by which people would die to sin—Original and actual—and begin to live a new life with God.”<sup>vi</sup> In our sacrament of Baptism, God offers the forgiveness of sin and strengthens us to fight the temptation to sin again. In the Baptism liturgy, an adult is asked to reject sin and to profess their faith God. When an individual is younger or an infant, parents and godparents speak on behalf of those who cannot yet speak for themselves.

As we move towards Easter when we welcome new members into the church, it is not surprising to see the reading from Ezekiel on the life-giving waters that flow out of the temple, nor of the healing of the crippled man near the pool of Bethesda. For those who are already members of the church, it is helpful to have these reminders to die to sin in our own lives. We know the devil is always tempting us to betray our baptismal promises and that we are weak and need help. Through the sacrament of confession, we continue to seek out the healing power of Jesus to forgive sins and to reconcile us to the Father. “A clean heart create for me, O God; give me back the joy of your salvation” (Ps 51:12a, 14a).

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<sup>i</sup> On Holy Thursday, Jesus took a cup of wine and blessed it telling us it is the Blood of the New Covenant. On Good Friday, he shed his blood on the Cross. When we celebrate Mass, the chalice of wine becomes the “Blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for . . . the forgiveness of sins.”

<sup>ii</sup> Preface Nativity John the Baptist.

<sup>iii</sup> Prayer over Offerings – All Souls

<sup>iv</sup> United States Catholic Catechism for Adults . Chapter 15 on Baptism.

<sup>v</sup> Ibid

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid