

“No lucky charms here” Rom 6:3-5

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

Today, as we remember our baptisms, also our sermon will be a meditation on one of the texts in the New Testaments, from Paul’s letter to Romans, where the apostle explains what the Holy Baptism gives us.

But first we need to address some common and dangerous misunderstandings about Baptism. Before our God and Saviour Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, He commissioned His apostles to do something. We know it as the Great Commission.

What was it? Jesus said: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore 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, to the end of the age.” (Mat 28:18-20)

It is not hard to see and understand what exactly Jesus commanded. Make disciples! That’s it. How are we to do it? It is very clear and simple. Jesus has told what the means by which His disciples are made are. There are two things that we need to do in order to make Jesus’ disciples. Make them by baptizing and by teaching to observe all that Jesus has commanded to us.

Very simple. Our task, our mission, the mission of the Church, and of every congregation is to make Jesus’ disciples. How? By baptizing and by teaching them everything. These two are like two sides of the same coin. One side is baptizing, the other is teaching everything.

This is important to understand that these are not two alternatives. Either ... or... No, they are two inseparable activities, which both together enable the Church to make Jesus’ disciples. Disciple-making doesn’t work properly if we have only one.

Now about this misunderstanding. Especially for people who are born in cultures influenced by Christ and His Church, there is this idea that, yes, baptism is something very special.

It becomes almost like something magical. Almost like a lucky charm. “So, how can we protect us from bad things happening, how can we get better life for our children, how can we get a bit more of God’s blessings? By means of baptism.”

You see, where the problem is? If someone thinks about the Holy Baptism this way, as about something that automatically, in some magical way will deliver to them good things for this life, they are, first, missing the whole point and greatness of what Holy Baptism truly gives us, and, second, they actually try to manipulate God. This is exactly what the second commandment prohibits.

And as you know the second commandment is the only one which comes together with a warning. “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.” (Ex 20:7)

If someone thinks they can separate Holy Baptism from its context, and use it for their own benefit, they should be aware that the Holy God is not to be manipulated, and His gifts are not to be misused according to our own ideas.

Holy Baptism, indeed, is something very special, very, very special, and we’ll talk a bit later what God gives us in Holy Baptism. However, when people begin to look at Holy Baptism as something they can separate from the life in God’s family, in His Church, as something they can separate from teaching all that Jesus has commanded, they misuse this precious gift of God, which Jesus Christ obtained for us not with gold or silver, but with His innocent sufferings and with His precious blood.

Holy Baptism is not a lucky charm, it is God’s way to adopt us as His children, so we would live in His family, the Church, and would learn everything that Jesus has commanded us.

How do we learn? Sitting at the feet of our Lord and Saviour, listening to what He Himself teaches us. Where? In the Divine Service, in our Bible Studies, in our home devotions, when we read and meditate upon the Word of God.

Making disciples in life long journey. It begins with our baptism and it ends when the Lord decides to call us in His nearer presence. It is a life of commitment, and of self-discipline, it is a life of taking our crosses, it is a life where we every day crucify our selfish desires and strive to live for Jesus and for all people in our lives.

This is how we need to look at Holy Baptism. Not as a magical lucky charm, but as undeserved, precious, God given gift, which connects us to God’s eternal family, to this joyful learning community, Jesus’ disciples, with people with whom we’ll spent eternity, but whom we can start loving already here.

Let’s now look at what Paul the apostle wrote about the effects and benefits of Holy Baptism. “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”

Here Paul teaches us about something incomprehensible, what dear Martin Luther called a wonderful, joyful exchange. What is it? When the Creator chose to become a creature, when eternal God chose to become a man, something unique happened.

In Jesus from Nazareth these two, God and man, eternal God and humanity became one. This union was as close and intimate as we can possibly imagine. God and man united in one person.

When this happened, they both, Almighty God and man, brought into this union what was theirs. We can say that they both brought into this union everything that characterizes God and everything that characterizes humanity.

What are these things? Humanity is characterized by our creaturely limits, our neediness, our brokenness, our sinfulness, by God's wrath upon our sin and by coming judgment and by death.

God, on the other side is characterized by His holiness, innocence, righteousness, eternal life, divine glory and so on. In Jesus Christ this wonderful and joyous exchange happened. It is wonderful and joyful only on our part.

Jesus Christ, the innocent and righteous Son of God took what belongs to humanity, more, what fallen and rebellious humanity deserves and brought it to the cross. He took all our sins, guilt, shame, rebellion, everything we have failed to do and received God's wrath and our death.

This is where Jesus' baptism happened. On the cross. Remember, baptism means cleansing, washing, purification. On the cross, by means of His own death, Jesus washed away all our sins, all of them, till the last one. They all are taken away.

Now, the real question for us is, – how do we receive this unbelievable gift, God's forgiveness, salvation and eternal life? God's answer is simple. It begins with your baptism. Jesus baptism took place on the cross, our baptism takes place at the font.

Jesus received God's wrath for all our sins, and separation from the Father. We receive gentle washing with water, sweet promises of God the Father, forgiveness of our sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Isn't it wonderful, isn't it joyful, isn't this gift something we need to cherish and care for as much as we can, by God's grace, fearing that we don't ever lose it, or stop appreciating it, but can continually listen to Jesus as He speaks to us together with His chosen people.

“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

Our baptism is our death for everything that is contrary to God's holy will, and it is at the same time our birth with our new identity. Jesus was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, and the same Spirit who was at work raising Jesus, was given to you in your baptism.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit, to create in us new hearts, and to give us faith and trust in Jesus, so that as Jesus rouse free from death, we also could live new life. Restored life. What does it mean practically?

Our good God has created us for a particular life and even after the Fall His good and gracious will for our lives is revealed to us in His holy commandments. Now, when we are baptized, when we are forgiven, when the Holy Spirit has created new hearts in us, we are again enabled to learn and to understand what God's will for our lives is and to strive to live accordingly.

This is what it means to live after our baptism. Daily turning away from anything that is against the good and gracious will of our loving Father, and seeking for His guidelines and His blessings in everything we do.

And what a motivation we have to do this! "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." That's it, – the resurrection of the body and the life eternal.

This is what your loving Lord has prepared for you, this is what He has promised to you in your baptism. Sure, we have this scary freedom and power to leave our Father's house, to leave His family, to ignore what He has done and does for us, even to pretend that He doesn't exist, and our Lord won't force us to come to Him.

But as soon as we respond to His call, as soon as we turn to Him, as soon as we repent and seek His forgiveness, it is here. The promises that God gave you in your baptism, He will never revoke. We can reject them, that's a different scenario.

But He will remain faithful, whatever happens. If someone asks you, "what would happen with you, if you die this night?" you can joyfully and with full assurance answer: "I would see my dear Saviour Jesus face-to-face in His eternal kingdom."

"But how do you know? Have you been perfect? Have you never sinned? Have you never done anything wrong? Do you really deserve?" Then you can reply: "I am far from being perfect, I have sinned in my thoughts, words and actions, I don't deserve God's forgiveness, nor I can merit it, but ... I am baptized. Jesus has taken my place, my sins, God's wrath, and has given me His innocence, righteousness and life. I will be with Him. This I know."

And the peace of God which surpasses all our understanding, keep your minds and hearts in Jesus Christ. Amen.