



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©
* Knights of Malta *

June
2012

Chancellor's Update

Partnership with Christ

In our last issue of the Chancellor's Update an attempt was made to help Christians remove the confusion they find in their lives and in particular in marriage. In this issue an attempt will be made to show us how to use the Sacrament and Graces of Baptism to accomplish this task.

It is in baptism that we become members of the Mystical Body of Christ. In ancient times the total immersion of the individual signified his regeneration to a newness of life. It was Our Lord who told us: *Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God* (John III, 5). Baptism is a rebirth but does not remove our fallen nature. Baptism is only the beginning of putting off the old man and putting on the new man, which will reach its normal and natural end with our death. We must do every act in our daily lives with eternity in sight. We must work to become perfect like our heavenly Father. Always remembering the words of St. John the Baptist uttered centuries ago: *He must increase, I must decrease*. (John III, 30)

Baptism makes us Members of the Body of Christ, thus we are entitled to all His riches, His merits and His Sonship; thus one who dies immediately after baptism goes directly to heaven by inheritance, not merit, because he a son of God and therefore heir to His Kingdom. By being living members of the Body of Christ, St. Paul often says: *That Christ is in us and we are in Christ*. Thus baptism starts the soul's vital partnership with Christ and the Holy Ghost as they take up Their abode in the soul. This abode is not a passive thing but an active power enabling the soul to reach new heights of perfection. This perfection needs the Living Bread of Life that has come down from heaven in the form of the Holy Eucharist. Their desire is to share and to animate every single action of our lives. As St. Paul reminds us that as we died with Him in baptism, we are partners in His crucifixion, we will also rise with Him. Let us remember at this point that Our Lord's love is infinite, and, therefore, it is not lessened by being shared, so that each can say with St. Paul: *He loved me, and delivered Himself for me*. (Gal II, 20)

Here we must pause and remind ourselves that Christ has redeemed us from all our sins. He has merited sufficient (enough) grace to save all men for all times, if they wish to be saved. Thus, we may say with St. Paul: *To them that love God, all things work together unto good!* (Rom. VIII, 28) One must also remember the comment of St. Augustine on this topic: *All things- yes-even your sins!* (Cf. St. Augustine: DeCatech. Rud. Lib. 4, and Summa III,I,a) This should give us sinners tremendous confidence that if we remain faithful to Christ that all will end well for us.

Now we come to His Passion. St. Paul writing to the Romans makes a connection to baptism and the death of Jesus on the cross. *Know you not, that we who are baptized in Christ Jesus are baptized into His death*. (Rom. VI, 3-7) How does this work for us today?

Our Lord at the Last Supper gave us the means and the answer to our question. It is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and Holy Communion. Under the appearance of bread and wine His sacrifice is sacramentally re-presented (Cavalry rolls forward to the 21st century or we roll back to 33 A.D.) on the altar. He comes to us in His entirety and riches as true God and true Man. Why does Our Lord do this? St. John Chrysostom gives us the answer. *He wants to show us the ardent desire that He has for us. On which account, He pours Himself into us, intimately unites Himself to us, and mingles His Body with us, so that we may be 'unum quid' – one thing, one entity- as a Body joined to a Head; for this is the very desire and longing of ardent lovers.* (St. John Chrysostom: In Joh. Hom. 46)

From the Garden of Gethsemani to His death on the cross, Christ is reckoned with us sinners as He takes on the sins of the world for the redemption of mankind. It is in this reckoning or partnership with us that he redeems us. He comes to us full of perfect knowledge and knows exactly what our life will be. He knows exactly what we are. He knows all our weaknesses and defects. He knows what has happened, will happen and all misfortunes and miseries that will befall us. He is prepared to heal all ills and repair our life completely, if we do not prevent Him. *And God is able to make all grace abound in you, that ye always, having sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.* (II Cor., IX, 8) *Our sufficiency is from God.* (II Cor., III, 5)

If we fully understand what receiving one Holy Communion can do for us in restoring all our wasted past and damaged self, the words of St. John I, 16 say it all: *Of His fullness we have all received.* Our Lord continues: *I am come that **they** may have life and have it more abundantly.* (John X, 10) St. Paul sums up for us on this topic writing to the Corinthians: *for the grace that is given you in Christ Jesus, that in all things you are made rich in Him... that nothing is wanting to you in any grace.* (I Cor., I, 4-7)

In baptism we start our partnership with Christ and the Holy Spirit with the infusion of sanctifying grace. This grace allows our soul to reach heights that are not capable for natural man. We receive the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity, the infused moral virtues, prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. This grace allows our partnership with Christ to grow. Baptism does not destroy our human nature or the consequences of original sin, but allows God to restore to mankind the supernatural life lost by Adam's sin and the means to overcome our concupiscence. God gives us the means to fight against our weaknesses.

If baptism is considered as a death, it is a death to one's self that takes place gradually. The sentence of death is passed at baptism. For it is at baptism we renounce the world, the flesh and the devil. The carrying out of the sentence takes a lifetime, and will only end at the grave. It is dying to one's self that leads us to our spiritual life. As St. Paul writes to the Romans: *For we are buried together with Him by baptism into death; that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so also we may walk in newness of life.... So do you also reckon, that you are dead to sin, but alive unto God, in Christ Jesus.* (Rom. VI, 4, 11)

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