

MIDWEEK LAETARE

Text: St. John 3:1-21; Titus 3:3-8

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Some things are beyond repairing. When an old building stands derelict and in ruin, one does not attempt to prop it up or add a new addition onto it to make it habitable. No, one simply pulls it completely down, even digging up the foundation, and builds anew where once the ruined structure stood.

Such is the structure of our fallen nature. For we were so derelict, so ruined by wickedness and the lust to do evil, that God, in His wisdom, decided not to try and prop up the old nature in us, but in Baptism, make of us new creations.

Tonight, St. Paul tells us, *“For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.”* Our derelict and foolish thinking have led us down the road to disobedience and ruin rather than to obedience to God’s Law. This is because our *“old nature”* is deceived by the lies of the devil, the world, and our own sinful desires. Our *“old nature”* is enslaved to all kinds of passions and pleasures.

We live our lives in malice and envy, *“hateful and hating one another.”* Then our *“old nature,”* our old sinful flesh, justifies it all by making excuses for itself, convincing itself with a myriad of rationalizations as to why it is acceptable to do the things it does and say the things it says. Things are so bad that the solution can only be found in completely razing the *“old nature,”* pulling down the old flesh, digging up the foundation, and building anew.

This, then, is the meaning of the Words of our LORD JESUS spoken to Nicodemus that night so long ago: *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the SPIRIT, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.”*

There is no other way! There is no other means by which one can be saved! No works of which one can conceive can ever compensate for the evil that lies at the very core of our being. Nor can any personal merit undo what has already been done—for there is no such merit within us.

Therefore, it will not suffice to attempt to patch up or mend one’s life with personal attempts at self-righteousness. Works righteousness is not the answer. Works cannot render us pure and godly; they cannot make us righteous and holy; and therefore works cannot save us. No, the sinner must stop sinning—something we are unable to do in this life. Thus, we must obtain a wholly different nature and our old sinful flesh must die along with our sinful nature that the sinner is sinner no more.

Such is Baptism. For in Baptism a new creature is born of water and SPIRIT where we are saved through *“the washing of regeneration and renewing of the HOLY SPIRIT.”* Thus, the Baptismal Font is both bath and womb. For in the Font one is *“cleansed... with the washing of water by the Word.”* Our Mother is the Church and the Font is her womb where we are bathed in the blessed waters to which our God adds His Word and command.

Thus, we are washed not only with water, but also with the Word of God. Therefore, whoever is baptized and believes is *“born again”* of God, *“not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”*

When you were brought up from the Waters of Baptism you came up without sin, all wickedness having been washed away. For, although it did not appear so, the Waters in the Font were red with the Blood of CHRIST; the Blood JESUS poured out on Golgotha where He was lifted up to make you sinless, according to His mercy, and justified, according to His grace.

Through this one sacramental act, our FATHER in heaven now sees you differently. He now sees you, not as a spiritual ruin full of sin and death, but as a chaste, pure, virginal Bride, wearing the white robes of CHRIST’s righteousness, washed clean in the precious Blood of His SON—a new creation!

Certainly, it is true that in this world you still sin. You are still plagued by Satan, the world, and your own sinful flesh. The Old Adam was drowned on the day that you were baptized, but as Martin Luther declared, the Old Adam is an excellent swimmer.

Therefore, each day it is important that you return to your Baptism in contrition and faith, receiving again and again, the benefit of that washing in CHRIST’s absolution, that you may lay your sins at the feet of JESUS as He hangs from His Cross, where your sins are crucified with Him and remembered no more.

In this is the hope of your salvation and when temptation, the world, the devil, and a guilty conscience plague you, you can make this joyful proclamation:

*Sin, disturb me no longer: I am baptized into CHRIST!
I have comfort even stronger: JESUS’ cleansing sacrifice.
Should a guilty conscience seize me
Since my Baptism did release me
In a dear forgiving flood, Sprinkling me with JESUS’ Blood?* (LSB 594)

In your Baptism you have received a *“new nature”* having been made a new creation, built upon a new foundation with JESUS as your capstone. In Baptism you come face to face with your Redeemer, JESUS CHRIST. There you receive the life of CHRIST, Himself, and your sin becomes permanently a thing of the past. How do you know? Because this is His promise and He cannot lie. You know because He has said to you: *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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