

## “God Is Not God of the Dead, But of the Living”

Luke 20:27-40

Last week, when we celebrated All Saints’ Day, I made a reference to this week’s Gospel reading, and no, this was not the part about zombies. When we remember the saints who have gone before us, we remember that they are not dead. Jesus says, “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” Jesus says elsewhere, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”

As I also said last week, “Whenever life and death are presented outside of the clear teaching of Scripture, wrong and even maddening views of reality can and will inevitably happen.” The simple, plain, clear biblical presentation of death and life followed by death and life for the believers in Christ is so often misunderstood or ignored.

We are born spiritually dead. We are spiritually dead, spiritually blind, enemies of God who flee from the light of His truth in the same way cockroaches scatter when you turn on the lights. Original sin is the total corruption of our human nature passed down from Adam through our parents. God says to Noah, “the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth [Gen. 8:21].” Your faith, created in you by the Holy Spirit, is a miracle.

It amazes me that there are any parents of young children who do not believe that those children are absolutely in need of the forgiveness of sins and saving grace found in Baptism. You cannot say that any infant (other than Christ) has ever greeted the world with total selflessness, charity, and concern for the needs of others over and above their own wants and needs. And then they become toddlers.

That child is seemingly alive, yet is really dead in their sin. We are born spiritually dead. Then we experience death again: the drowning of the Old Adam in the water and the Word. Paul says in Romans 6, "All of us who have been baptized in Christ Jesus were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with Him by Baptism into death." Not just His death, but this is where we truly experience death.

You are baptized, not just into Jesus' death, but into your own death which Jesus took for you on the cross nailing your record of debt owed to God to Himself, nailing the wrath and punishment for your sin to Himself, and burying it with Himself. In Christ you have died. Paul says elsewhere, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

And immediately in Baptism, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, you too have been raised to walk in newness of life. We go from death to life. And we live out our days under the grace of God in Christ's church.

If you want to see how this plays out in the life of the church, you need look no farther than your hymnal. Start with the rite of Holy Baptism beginning on page 268. Having been born into the sin of Adam (with the wages of sin being death), you die with Christ and are raised to a new life in water and the Word. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

But the baptismal rite doesn't really end. It doesn't really complete itself. The concluding prayer asks that God "would keep them in their baptismal grace" (receiving the forgiveness of sins and joy of the Gospel), "that according to Your good pleasure they may faithfully grow to lead a godly life to the praise and honor of Your holy name and finally, with all Your saints, obtain the promised inheritance in heaven; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. Peace be with you." The hope of the resurrection is found in Baptism, because our Lord is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

Then you turn the page and there is the rite of Confirmation and you answer many of the same questions that your sponsors answered for you many years before. You publicly confirm that the new life created in Baptism remains, and now you can answer for yourself. You publicly confirm that you believe in the reality of what God has done for you (and what He will do for you), and that you would suffer death (the death of this body) rather than falling away from the saving faith of your Baptism. Because God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. "Do not fear the one who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul in hell," Jesus says.

Then you turn the page again and there is the rite of Holy Matrimony. This is all part of growing up and leading a godly life to the praise and honor of Him who has given you life. Husbands and wives are to live together in holiness and virtue as God ordained it. And this is good in the sight of God. And then you have others who are like St. Paul and remain celibate throughout all their years – and are able to devote even more of their time to serving the Lord and His church. And this is good in the sight of God.

Then you turn the page again. The Funeral Service is the completion of the baptismal rite. After speaking the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into whose name this person lying in the coffin was baptized; having been raised from the death of sin to the new life in Christ; having publicly confirmed the faith of their Baptism in the rite of Confirmation and every time they confess the Creed and come to the Lord's Table to receive the broken body and shed blood of Christ (remembering the death where all of our guilt was buried – in Baptism); as the coffin is there before us, there is a white robe covering it (called the funeral pall; a reminder of the white robe traditionally worn in Baptism).

And I say, "In Holy Baptism, this person, was clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness that covered all their sin." And then we speak Paul's words from Romans 6 telling how we were baptized into Christ's death and were raised to walk in newness of life. And now, "if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His." Because, God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

Rejoice that through the faith of your Baptism, you have gone from death to life in Christ. Rejoice that through the faith of your Baptism, when this life ends, you will go from death to life eternal. Because, God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Amen.