



Opening Question:

What are your long term goals? How have you progressed in realizing them?

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step"

Chinese Proverb

How do I know I'm saved? The spiritual road can seem long and daunting. It can look so overwhelming that making the trip appears to be futile. Yet, like the wise saying from China, we answer the question of salvation step by step. And the first step begins with baptism.

Immersion

The term baptism means immersion in water. The idea of immersion sparks many images from the Bible.

In the beginning...God breathed his Spirit through the water.

Genesis 1:1a, 2c

Noah and his family entered the ark to escape the engulfing flood.

Genesis 7:7

The Lord opened a path through the water with a strong, east wind. So the people of Israel walked through the middle of the sea with walls of water on each side.

Genesis 14:21b, 22

Jesus himself was immersed in water.

Jesus came from Nazareth and was baptized by John in the Jordan river. When Jesus came out of the water, he saw the sky open and the Spirit descend like a dove. It entered him. A sound from heaven declared "You are the Son I love, I am very pleased with you!"

Mark 1:9-1



But baptism means far more than a ceremony of immersion. It is a sacrament that marks a growing faith journey towards God. Sometimes, that road's not easy. After Jesus predicted his suffering and death a third time. Then, John and James approached Jesus about leadership roles in the Kingdom. The Lord asked them:

Are you willing...to be plunged into the baptism I must endure?

Mark 10:38c, e

In fact, baptism unites us with the Passion and Resurrection. St. Paul wrote the Christians at Rome:

Don't you already know that, when we were baptized into Christ, we were baptized into his death? When we were baptized into his death, we were buried with him. Now we have a new life just like Christ has... If we are united to Christ in a death like his, we will rise to a new life like his.

Romans 6:3-4ab, 5

Three Types of Baptism

Baptism is necessary for salvation. On the surface, that seems restrictive, even contradictory. Doesn't the Church also teach the call to salvation is universal? To answer that knotty problem, the Church teaches there are actually three types of

baptism: one of water, one of blood, and one of desire.

The baptism of water is the sacramental sign that joins a believer to the Church. Everyone is called to the baptism of water. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says:

Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1257

However, it emphatically states:

God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1257

In other words, there are other means to salvation outside of sacramental immersion.

Next, we have a baptism of blood. An unbaptized person who dies for the faith is saved based upon their trust in the Lord.

Finally, there is a baptism of desire where someone is saved based upon their openness to God. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1260

Results of Baptism

What happens when someone is baptized? That person turns away from sin towards God. And God turns towards the sinner. Wherever God is, evil flees. So, the newly baptized is forgiven. He or she is also justified by God. In other words, God empowers the person to believe in, to hope in, and to love the Almighty. He opens the person up to the power of the Spirit. He gives the person the ability to grow morally. The newly baptized becomes a member of the Church. Finally, the person makes a radical commitment towards Christ. And Christ to the

person. This permanent reorientation is called an "indelible mark."

Elements of Baptism Ritual

How is someone baptized in the Church? Because baptism is a sacrament, it begins with the proclamation of the Good News. Then, it turns toward the faith of the person. Does he or she accept the gospel of Christ? Do they believe in the Trinity and reject evil as the creed outlines? If so, they are to be baptized. Water is poured over them three times, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Next, he or she is anointed with oil to indicate they are followers of the Christ, God's anointed One. This ritual also marks them for the power of the Spirit. For a newly baptized adult, this anointing is the sacrament of Confirmation. Afterwards, he or she receives a white garment and a light candle. The garment represents the purity of the believer at that moment. The light candle represents the presence of the Risen Christ. He is the light of the world and now is the divine light for the neophyte. Newly baptized adults go on to receive Eucharist during Mass. Finally, blessings for the newly baptized and those gathered mark the end of the sacrament.

Note, the public nature of the ceremony. One professes their faith and is received into the Church out in the open. It was in this context, that St Paul wrote to believers at Rome:

If you should openly declare "Jesus is Lord" and you should believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:9

A journey begins with a single step. The road to God begins with baptism. It doesn't matter whether the immersion is a sacrament, stepping out to defend the faith in the face of death, or a sincere life open to the possibility of God.

Salvation begins here but does not end here. It simply sets the stage for a life of growing faith. We, the baptized, live out our lives by constantly reliving the moment of our baptism. When God

forgave us, justified us, incorporated us into his Church, and permanently marked us as his own. In baptism, he walks with us on our faith journey. The question we need to answer is: Are we, in turn, willing to walk with him?

Closing Question:

How have you lived out your baptism?

Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs CCC 1213-1284.

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