



Sacraments 7/35: The Difference between the Catholic and Protestant View of Baptism

When I say the “Protestant” view, I am leaning more towards a Baptist, Pentecostal view. Mainline Protestants, such as Lutheran, Methodist, etc. would be a mix and I am not qualified to speak about that. For the evangelical Christians, Baptism is more of a public recognition of what has already occurred. They focus more on the “saving moment” as the beginning of their relationship with the Church. Once they have received Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, they are on the path to salvation. Baptism, then, would be a public ceremony that recognizes this already existing relationship. In the Catholic view, Sacraments cause the relationship, they cause the grace. This causation is exactly what Luther was against. The Sacramental ritual is a “work” and thus cannot be the cause of grace. It is the faith in the work that leads to grace. Baptists are also open, then, to “re-baptism” as a sign of renewal in the faith, where we would rely on the grace of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Yet I say that the personal acceptance of the Jesus as Savior in the Baptist “saving moment” can still be seen as a work. And the grace relies more on our own faith than on God’s work in us. This is why many have a theological problem with the song “Amazing Grace.” Think of the verse where grace appears “the hour I first believed.” It is all very personal, but lacks the communal and lacks any participation in the full Body of Christ. This grace could have been a preparatory grace, a prevenient grace, or an actual grace that led you to recognize Jesus as Savior. Any of these are graces that inspire and lead one to acceptance of Jesus. The conversion of St. Augustine, which he recounts in his autobiography, *Confessions*, is full of these preparing and attracting graces. They even led him to make an act of Faith in belief in Jesus Christ. The next step that must be taken, however, is a full participation in the sanctifying grace of the Sacraments, beginning with his Baptism. Sanctifying grace, the grace we need to go to heaven, only comes from the Sacraments. Through Baptism we are first buried and raised with Christ and incorporated into the Body of Christ, the Church.

So, “have you been saved?” Rather than only seeing this in the past tense, the Catholic answer is: “Yes, I have been saved. I have been saved through the waters of Baptism which unites me to Jesus Christ and His Church. I am in an ongoing process of sanctification through my participation in the life of His Church and His Sacraments. I also hope to be saved in the end by union with Christ, which I have now started.”

Being saved is not a once and for all process. Against Luther I say that Baptism is the beginning of a process of justification and sanctification. It takes a lifetime. Jesus is not just *my personal* Lord and Savior. He is *our* Lord and Savior, and the lifetime process of salvation must take place within the Body of Christ. It is not just about me getting into heaven, it is about all of us getting there at last!

-Fr. Kopp

Next Week: Catechism Summary of Baptism