

Invocabit

The Holy Baptism of Matix Santino Rivera

Matthew 4:1-11; Romans 6:3-4

Dear Matix, welcome to the family! You are now in Christ. You've been adopted into the church and God the Father has become your Father. This is how God describes it and it's good for all of us to hear again. God says through Paul in Romans:

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:3-4)

First, you'll notice that the verbs regarding baptism are passive... you have been baptized... you were buried. God here is the actor. He acts upon you. As Peter says in Acts, “be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38) You receive good things in your baptism, namely, the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. You're a receiver and not a doer. That's so important!

You receive the forgiveness of sins. You cannot earn this forgiveness. You cannot demand this forgiveness. You cannot buy this forgiveness. It must be given to you as a gift. And God our dear Father in heaven, knows our weakness, so He adds the wonderful gifts of Holy Absolution and the Holy Supper so that we continue to live in the forgiveness of sins.

You also receive the Holy Spirit. Again, you cannot earn or demand or buy the Holy Spirit. He is given to you as pure gift. Without the Holy Spirit, you cannot understand the Word of God or understand that you're a sinner in need of the forgiveness of your sins. The Holy Spirit promises to come to you in Word and Sacrament. He comes to you in the Divine Service. He comes to you in daily devotions. We'll talk more about that in a little bit.

Today's Gospel reading is a great reading for the occasion of a baptism. The temptation of Jesus happens right after He is baptized. Temptation happens to all of us and especially after the occasion of our baptism. The devil, the world, and our old Adam, or sinful self, tempt us into sin. Unbelievers are tempted by the world and their flesh, but the devil doesn't really care about them. Once you're baptized, however, you gain a powerful enemy in the devil. And he's a lot older and smarter than you are. The devil will tempt you the same way he tempts our Lord Jesus.

Two of the temptations start with "if you are the Son of God." The devil wants Jesus to doubt His identity. As soon as Jesus comes out of the waters of baptism, everyone at the baptism hears His Father speak these words: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17) God the Father publically claims that Jesus is His beloved Son and that He is pleased with Him. The devil immediately attacks Jesus' identity. He wants Jesus to doubt who He is so that Jesus doesn't complete the work He came to do. Jesus came to live, suffer, and die in our place as the unblemished Lamb of God, God Himself; in our place, so that we might be free from the tyranny of sin, death, and the devil.

Jesus delivers this work to you in your baptism where he makes you His brother or sister and God the Father your Father. As soon as you are baptized the devil wants you to doubt who you are in Christ, so that you reject your baptism. You see, before Baptism, you have no free will. Your will is curved in upon itself and bent on destruction. Once you receive the gift of Baptism, your will is beginning to be restored. Beginning only! Now you have the temptation to reject your identity in Christ. St. Paul warns us in his first letter to St. Timothy:

"Not the [Holy] Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared." (1 Timothy 4:1-2)

It's no surprise that Jesus uses agricultural references when talking about your faith in Him. It's like a little seed planted in the ground that must be watered, nurtured, and kept free from weeds to truly grow and prosper. Your Faith which you received in your Baptism must be watered with the Word of God, nurtured in both the family and the church, and keep free from the weeds of false teaching.

This is why church is so important. If you stay away from church where the Word of God is taught purely and the Sacraments are administered rightly, your Faith will begin to wither and die. If your family doesn't daily engage in the Word of God, you are also in danger of having your Faith wither and die.

You noticed, I'm sure, that Jesus' defense against the temptations of Satan is the Word of God. The Word of God is your weapon against the temptations of the devil, the world, and your flesh. That's why God admonishes us in Deuteronomy to always have His Word in our minds, lips, and heart. God says:

“These Words that I command you today shall be on your heart. YOU shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”
(Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

I encourage you, Marciano and Tiffany, to take this admonition from our Lord seriously. I also encourage all of us to take this admonition from the Lord seriously. Now, I know it's hard when you're a young family to devote time to the Word of God. I encourage you to start small. First, have dinner, or another meal, together around the dinner table daily. This is just plain good advice for all of us! Second, devote a small portion of time before or after you eat to prayer and the Word of God. Since your kids are small, I would recommend a good children's Bible so that your kids learn the true stories of the Bible. As they get older, you can switch to using a regular Bible. Read a paragraph or a chapter together around the dinner table together. Take up reciting a portion of the catechism and discussing it. Again, start small. Maybe in the beginning you only take five minutes. And that's good advice for all of us. Also, take your children to church frequently. I guarantee you that if you don't do something like this, your Faith won't be important to your children because you show that it's not really important to you. That's a good reminder for all of us. And if you've failed to take your faith seriously so that your adult children no longer go to church, repent and start out small!

Sometimes, we get zealous and decide to take on everything at once. I may be inclined to this particular problem myself! If you've done this like I have, you know firsthand that you run out of steam at some point.

There's a reason there's a lot fewer people at the gym today than in January! The important thing in dieting or fitness for either the body or the mind is consistency. The only way that consistency happens is by starting out small. I can guarantee you that no matter how small you start, if you stay consistent, you will see fruit! Whenever you engage with the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is there working on you. And that will bear fruit over time!

I hope you also noticed that the devil also used the Word of God when tempting Jesus. So there must be a right use and a wrong use of the Word of God. This is another reason why the church is so important. Since the beginning of the church, and of time, really, the people of God have been dealing with the temptations and deceptions of the devil. The Nicene creed we recite every week is a Christian confession of the truth, or a right use of the Word of God, against heretics who abused that Word. Our Confessions in our Book of Concord, which includes the Nicene Creed, by the way, are a Christian confession of the truth against errors and deceptions of the devil.

This highlights the importance of having trained pastors and experienced elderly at church. Pastors are trained to rightly divide the Word of truth so that we give you what you need for the forgiveness of sins and training in righteousness. Mature Christians are needed in the church so that we can all learn what a righteous Christian life looks like. God uses pastors to proclaim God's Word, teach, and administer the Sacraments to God's people. God uses mature Christians in His church to safeguard the church and to steer it away from error. May God continue to bless His church with faithful pastors and faithful mature Christians. That's the only way we'll survive the temptations of the devil, the world, and our flesh. Listen to our catechism

What is the Sixth Petition? And lead us not into temptation.

What does this mean? God tempts no one. We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory.

Today God has claimed Matix as His own. In your baptism, you were claimed by God as well. God desires all of you to win the victory and die in Christ. He accomplishes this victory in you by the means of His Holy Spirit working through the Word of God and Sacraments. Let me leave you a final admonition from St. Paul:

“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:7-9)

That is pretty harsh and something all of us need to hear. So let me leave you with this promise to all the baptized into Christ:

“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus.” (Philippians 1:6)

Remember that you are the workmanship of the Holy Spirit of God who works through Word and Sacrament! Amen.