

Dear Saints,

I went to a man's deathbed today. He is a friend of one of our members. He was lucid and knew that he was dying. He had been hostile to the Gospel, but his death has opened him up to remember his baptism. He was baptized as a child. For reasons unknown to me, he fell away from the faith and, in time, became hostile to it. Two Christians persistently tried to share the Gospel with him, even though he was hostile, and it took the realization that he was dying for him to be responsive to it. This is a real-life picture of the Ash Wednesday admonition, "Remember, O Man, that you are dust and to dust, you shall return." It is easy for us to forget this admonition in the busyness and distractions of life. When you are dying, you are struck in the face with the reality that you are dust. The fact remains, though, that death can come at any time.

No one is guaranteed a rich and full life. Since we are conceived in sin, we are from the moment of conception stalked by death. St. Paul says, "Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned." (Romans 5:12) Death is our constant companion throughout life and it can strike at any time. Thanks be to God, death does not have the final say. St. Paul continues, "If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:17) Jesus won the free gift of life for us by His righteous self-sacrifice on the cross. If you know Romans well, you know what comes next! "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) Baptism gives us life in the face of death! Not just life in the second coming of our Lord, but life now! Baptism is a wonderful gift of God.

I focused on Baptism with the man who was dying. One of the beautiful things about Baptism is that it is always there for you. The incredible benefits of baptism described by Paul in Romans 6 never go away! This man was baptized, and thanks be to God, was returned to his baptism. He will live even though he is going through death right now. This is the joy of Easter. Death is overcome. Jesus defeated death on the cross. His resurrection is proof that our Father in heaven accepted His sacrifice. That resurrection is applied to you in your Baptism. Your baptism is the proof that your Father in heaven accepts you! "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33)

A man is dying. But this man has received the victory over death in his baptism. You too will die. You also have received the victory over death in your baptism. When death comes close to us, it is a great time to remember our baptism. Whenever death visits you, remember that you are baptized. You are washed clean from all your sin. You have life in the midst of death! God be praised, this is the joy of Easter!

In Christ,
Pastor Maggard