

December 13, 2017
Advent 2 Midweek
Matthew 28:16-20

Tattoos are all the rage these days and I must admit that I don't understand the craze at all. I don't mean to dump on you if you have a tattoo, but I just don't get it. I can't think of anything that could drive me to want to permanently mark some phrase or image into my skin. Okay, maybe one thing.

If Jesus spoke to me and told me that He was going to tattoo something of Himself on me, then I'd do it. I'd be overjoyed to do it. And I'm sure it would be the most perfect tattoo, and that every time I gazed on it I would count myself blessed to have been touched by God. The advent, the arrival, of that sacred mark on my flesh would daily be cause for thanks and celebration.

As we journey through Advent, pondering Christ's arrival in the past and His coming again in the future, I'm highlighting His arrival in our present. And simply put, in the present we've been marked by Christ, and I don't think any of us appreciate this the way we should.

You see, Jesus gave His church this Great Commission: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Jesus, having accomplished everything He was sent into our flesh to accomplish in His living a perfect life, dying under all mankind's penalty of sin and then rising in victory and leaving death, Satan and sin powerless, gives this wonderful order to baptize from His absolute authority. This is not a man thing that the church thought up. This is a God thing—God putting

His name and claim on you; putting you through the cross and tomb with Jesus and into the eternal kingdom forever. This is God reaching down and marking you “MINE”.

This very simply is Christ arriving, adventing on you in the fullness of His grace and mercy. Your Holy Baptism is Christ binding Himself to you that He would always be with you, to the end of the age! We have God’s wonderful promises, “*Baptism...now saves you*” from St. Peter. “*We were buried with [Christ Jesus] 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*” from St. Paul. Jesus’ very own simple words recorded by St. Mark, “*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.*” Your Holy Baptism is Jesus Christ, in all His work of salvation, adventing on you!

But we tend to esteem baptism little, probably because a baptism doesn’t look like much to begin with, and it’s a one-time event that most of us don’t even remember. We have this horrible tendency to leave our baptism in the back closet of our consciousness while we look for something, I don’t know, more “spiritual” to hang our hat on.

If Jesus personally tattooed your right forearm, would you be looking for something better to put on the left? No! Of course not! What you have is the perfect work of God! What can you do, what can anyone else do, that is greater than what the work of Christ has already done for you? All of that work, the life, the cross, the empty tomb—it’s all right there in the water and the Word!

And it’s not past! “Baptism NOW saves you!” Present tense! Jesus did this to you that your faith in Him would have this concrete target at which to be aimed. Faith in Christ is faith in the baptism He ordained and accomplished on you for your forgiveness and life everlasting. In your baptism Christ dwells on, in and with you this very day. Believe it.

Each and every day you can look back and the sins and failures of yesterday and sure, they are ugly, nasty, evil and damning. But you stand baptized into Christ! He has done the washing that He was born into humanity in Bethlehem to accomplish on you! His work is never in question, imperfect, worthy of doubt! All authority in heaven and earth is His because His work was, is and always shall be perfect. And His work, His baptism, stands achieved on you! Those sins, heinous though they be, were brought to nothing by Christ and His holy and victorious name lays claim to your body and soul this very day.

I know we all want signs and wonders. Some folks look to get themselves so filled with the Holy Spirit they break out in tongues nobody can understand. Some folks look to impress the Almighty with good works piled up high and listed before God and neighbor. Others just rock out to the music until they can just feel the faithful frenzy. Some pray until their knees ache, volunteer at church until there's no more hours left, or do who knows what to attain as close to certainty of salvation as they can get.

But that's all stuff we do. That's like trying to tattoo yourself and pull it off as only a grand master artist can accomplish. If you want certainty you need to look at what Christ has done. He's done your Baptism. It really is that simple.

I think I've made the point, a point Holy Scripture makes again and again. Baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is the entire boatload of salvation in Christ. You want Jesus to act in your life? Look to your Holy Baptism. Hope in your Baptism. Believe in your Baptism. Jesus has, and daily does, act in your Holy Baptism.

Jesus marked you there, and He marked you "saved".

Amen.