

"I am baptizing you with water...HE will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and FIRE."

The Evangelist Luke has just brought the original four elements of the ancient world together in one short breath: earth, water, fire, air. **Earth**, in reference to the people to whom John the Baptist is speaking, the clay from which God made man; **water**, which cleanses our bodies; **fire**, that purges and purifies; and **air**, that which is necessary for us to live, in this case, the Holy Spirit.

The people coming to John for baptism and to listen to his preaching on repentance are fully aware of the symbolism behind the cleansing power of water. They know the stories of the Great Flood as it cleansed the world of all that was evil – making a **NEW** beginning for mankind. They know how water saved them from the hands of Pharaoh as their forefathers passed thru the waters of the Jordan River, and how evil was washed away as the river closed upon Pharaoh's army.

They understand John's teachings because they know the benefit of ritual washings with water, to clean themselves and the food they eat. But John's teaching goes deeper, that it's not enough just to be clean on the outside – one must be clean on the **INSIDE** as well. John is cleaning, **PREPARING**, them for the one who is coming and who is mightier than he, who will baptize, **CLEANSE** them, with the Holy Spirit and fire.

The people can easily make the connection with the Spirit, as air, **LIFE**, breathed into them as God breathed life into Adam; and the power of fire, a blaze that consumes all that is thrown into it, or when controlled, can purify, **eliminate** impurity.

So how do we understand baptism in our time TODAY, if we use John the Baptist's ritual and words? We see in the outward sign of water the cleansing of our soul of Original sin, the sin of Adam and Eve in their disobedience to God's command. Our souls are made pure, as by fire, to be acceptable tabernacles to hold our Lord deep within us. By

the Holy Spirit we are made **NEW**, a **NEW LIFE** breathed into us by God, a life that is unstained by sin and with a burning desire, a **ZEAL**, to do the Will of God. After all, we are His creation, made in His image and likeness.

Yet, we know Baptism as a one-time good deal. What are we to do as we age and become enthralled with the world around us, turning our lives over to godless ways and worldly desires? Just as in the story of the prodigal son, God is ever watching for us to return to Him, to lay before Him our sins and seek His forgiveness.

Through the Sacrament of Confession we reconcile ourselves with God, again infused with the Holy Spirit, given a new life, a clean slate with a fresh start. We have faith in an ever-merciful Father, who does not look to condemn us, but to have us enjoy His everlasting glory. We need to believe in the words of Jesus when he said, "Your faith has saved you."

In going to Confession we are saved **NOT** by our own actions and righteous deeds, but by the mercy of God, "through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit", not of water this time, but through Jesus Christ offering **himself** for our salvation thru his death and resurrection, done for us who are his brothers and sisters, and thus **HEIRS** in hope of everlasting life.

In this light as heirs with Christ we **TOO** should hear, spoken to **US** someday, the words heard from heaven at the baptism of Jesus: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." May **OUR** lives, like that of Jesus Christ, be a pleasing sacrifice to God, **OUR** Father.