

The washing of regeneration. – Titus 3:5.

Baptism works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.

When a Christian who is not well grounded in the Word of God hears this, he is astonished and doubtfully asks: How can water do such great things? You know the answer. It is not mere water, indeed, that does them, but the Word of God which is in and with the water; this puts these things into Baptism. And faith, which trusts such Word of God in the water, takes these great things out of Baptism, and appropriates them.

Do you fully understand this, my dear Christian? Without the Word of God the water is simple water and no Baptism. But with the Word of God it is a Baptism: a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost. Through His Word God has placed into the water of Baptism forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, and the Holy Ghost for kindling faith in us. You are baptized. You believe. And so you are regenerated. You are a child of God that possesses forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, and the Holy Ghost. And the Holy Ghost creates within you a new mind.

You rejoice in the possession of the great gifts of the grace of God; you do fear, love, and trust in God; you possess new life. Thus Baptism is a washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, whom God has shed on us abundantly in Baptism through Jesus Christ, our Savior, that, being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life, as St. Paul teaches, Titus, chapter three. This is a faithful saying.

PRAYER. – Lord, my God, my gracious God, I thank You for what You have done to me in Baptism! You have regenerated me. You have given me forgiveness of sins, and thereby that righteousness which is valid in Your sight. You have delivered me from death and the devil, and given me eternal salvation. You have granted to me the Holy Spirit, who works and sustains faith and a



Illustration: Christ Stilling the Tempest

A Devotional for the
Week of the Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity.

new spiritual life within me. O my God, in the possession of such grace let me live and die, and awaken and live forever. Amen, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Hymn 403, 6.

That by the water and the Word
We're born again, we thank Thee, Lord!
In life and death Thine let us be,
And Thine in all eternity.

MONDAY.

Therefore we are buried with Him by Baptism into death, that, like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. – Romans 6:4.

Through Baptism we Christians are made partakers of Christ, and of all the salvation which He has procured for us." As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:27.) Christ died and was buried for our sins as our Substitute. We are made partakers of this through Baptism: we are dead and buried unto our sin, so that it can neither damn nor control us." Therefore we are buried with Him by Baptism into death. "Christ, our Substitute, was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, and now lives a new life, free from the burden of our sin. This, too, we are made partakers of through Baptism: we have a new life, free from the burden of our sin.

"Even so we also should walk in newness of life." What does this mean? It means that the old Adam in us, the sinful depravity which we have inherited from Adam, and in which we are born, should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts.

Daily we Christians should repent of the sin which clings to us, and pray God to forgive it for Christ's sake. That kills the power

of sin. And, again, a new man should daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity. Such a new man, a new spiritual being and life, is in us Christians through the grace of Baptism which we have received, This new man should arise within us daily unto a godly life and conversation, And this new man shall live forever, in eternal glory, freed entirely from the old Adam.

– This is what our Baptism should signify to us Christians.

PRAYER. – Lord, my God, who out of great mercy, through the washing of regeneration, did make me a partaker both of the death and of the life of my Savior, I pray You to bestow upon me the power of Your Holy Spirit, that I may daily die to sin, but live to You and serve You, until in the life to come I shall be wholly renewed and in perfect bliss. Amen.

Hymn 403, 5.

So, too, by our repentance, must
The old man, with his sins and lust,
Be daily drowned, and then arise
A new man, righteous, pure, and wise.

TUESDAY.

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. – John 3:5-6.

The widely spread Baptist sect - in fact, the entire Reformed Church, of which it is a branch - considers Baptism a mere outward ceremony, without regenerating power. And they say it is wrong to baptize little children, because, so they claim, little children cannot believe.

– Are the children who are born within the Christian Church to be baptized in their infancy? Yes, indeed; for they are flesh born of flesh, having inherited the sinful depravity of their parents. And very solemnly does the Lord Jesus assure us of the fact that no one can enter the kingdom of God except he be born of water and the Spirit, that is to say, regenerated. And whom does Jesus command us to baptize? All nations. (Matthew 28:19.) And, surely, the little children, too, are included in "all nations." And He emphasized it very particularly that the kingdom of God belongs to little children. (Mark 10:14.) Hence also Baptism, which regenerates them to the kingdom of God, belongs to little children.

Were not the little children of God's people in the Old Covenant circumcised on the eighth day by divine command? And has not Baptism in the New Testament taken the place of circumcision? (Colossians 2:11-12.) And also little children can believe. The Holy Ghost, who in Baptism is poured out upon them, kindles faith within them, though we do not understand how He does it. Jesus says of little children that they believe in Him. (Matthew 18:2-6.) Thus out of the mouth of babes and sucklings has the Lord ordained strength because of His enemies. (Psalm 8:2 & Matthew 21:16.) And John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Ghost already in his mother's womb, and believed in his Savior. (Luke 1:44.)

O Christian, be not deceived, but comfort yourself with the Baptism you have received in infancy.

PRAYER. – Lord, help me, lest I be misled by false and fanciful doctrine. Grant me grace to comfort myself with the Baptism received in infancy unto my dying hour, and through the grace obtained therein to obtain life everlasting. Amen.

Hymn 252, 3.

An olive wild by nature
Thou graftedst me anew;

Death preyed upon my vitals,
And claimed me as his due:
But Christ's atoning blood,
In death true comfort granting,
Drowned death with all his vaunting,
In His baptismal flood.

WEDNESDAY.

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.
– Revelation 2:10.

Dear Christian! You, no doubt, were baptized in infancy. There you did receive the grace of God procured for you by Christ. There the Holy Ghost kindled faith in you. Hence there you were regenerated and made a child of God. Hence you, in fact, did yourself what your sponsors did for you with their mouths: you did renounce the devil and all his works and all his pomp, and did pledge yourself to the Triune God, to be His own in life and death, in time and eternity. Since that time this Word of our Lord applies to you: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Did you always remain faithful? Or, having fallen, did you return to your baptismal grace through faith in Christ?

– Mark well what God's will and regulation is with respect to His baptized little children. As soon as possible they are to be nourished with the Word of God, diligently, daily, and properly, that they may remain faithful. This is what Jesus meant when saying to Peter: "Feed my lambs." (John 21:15.) This the Holy Spirit admonishes the fathers to do, saying that they should bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4.)

For this purpose well-regulated Christian congregations maintain Christian parish schools. To this same end our children

receive special instruction for Confirmation. At Confirmation, which is a laudable custom of our Church, the children after due instruction, publicly, in the presence of the congregation, with their own mouths repeat the promise which once they made through their sponsors: to renounce the devil and all his works and all his pomp, and to remain true to the Triune God, even unto death. And this baptismal vow, this confirmation vow, should endure throughout life. Let him that reads this hear what the Savior says: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

PRAYER. – O Lord, gracious Trinity, who in my Baptism did regenerate me to be Your child, I now repeat my vow that I will renounce the devil and all his works and all his pomp, and will remain true to You unto death. To this end grant me the power of Your Holy Spirit, O Father, for the sake of Jesus Christ, my Savior, and finally give me the crown of life which You have graciously promised me. Amen.

Hymn 400, 7.

And never let my purpose falter,
O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
But keep me faithful to Thine altar,
Till Thou shalt call me from my post;
So unto Thee I live and die,
And praise Thee evermore on high.

THURSDAY.

For the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. – Ephesians 4:12.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has instituted an *office* in His Church on earth, An office is a service, a ministry, vested with certain powers, a service performed in the name and at the command of some

superior person. Such an office, which is to be administered in His name, our Lord and Savior has instituted in His Church on earth.

To what purpose? For the edifying of the body of Christ, that ever more people may be joined to Christ through faith, and be strengthened in such faith. What, therefore are the functions of this office? To preach the Gospel, to administer the Sacraments, and to forgive or to retain the sins to individual persons.

To His disciples Jesus said: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." (Matthew 28:18-20.) And again He said to them: "Peace be unto you! As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." And when He said this, He breathed on them and said to them: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained. (John 20:21-23.)

This office is called the " Office of the Keys," according to the saying of Christ: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 16:19.) For by means of the Gospel, and the Sacraments connected with it, sins are forgiven. And where sins are forgiven, there heaven is opened. But if according to the Word of Christ sins are retained to any one, then heaven is closed to such a one.

PRAYER. – I thank You, Lord Jesus, O Most High, that within Your Church on earth You have instituted the ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, through which You increase, strengthen, and preserve Your beloved Christendom unto eternal life. Grant me Your grace, I pray You, that in this office I may always seek forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of my faith. And guard me, lest I belong to those whose sins must be retained through fault of their own. Amen.

Hymn 425, 4.

Give us Thy Spirit, peace afford
Now and forever, gracious Lord!
Thy Word and holy Sacrament
Preserve to us, till life is spent.

FRIDAY.

Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. – Matthew 18:18.

Who are the " ye " in this text? To whom did our Lord Jesus Christ give the Office of the Keys and all the powers connected with it – to whom? Whom did Christ command to preach the Gospel, to baptize, to administer the Lord's Supper, to forgive and to retain sins? There is much dispute on this question. We will therefore look into the Bible, and so, very simply, get the answer from the Word of God.

– At one time Jesus said to believing Peter: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:19.) So here the Lord gave to Peter the Office of the Keys. And now the Pope raves and asserts that the Office of the Keys belongs to him, on the further assumption that Peter was the first Pope.

But the Lord gave the same office to the assembled disciples, both men and women, saying: "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." (John 20:21 & 23.)

Here many assert that the Office of the Keys was given to the pastors, which is foolishness. In the text at the head of our lesson the Lord says to every Christian, and to all Christians assembled as a

Christian congregation at any one place: "Verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Hence to all Christians, wheresoever some of them may be assembled, whether they be few or many (Matthew 18:20), the Lord gave the Office of the Keys. The Office of the Keys "is the peculiar church-power which Christ has given to *His Church on earth*," says our Catechism, in accordance with the Word of God.

PRAYER. – Lord Jesus, from Your Word I know that You have made me, too, Your disciple and a member of Your Church, to whom You have committed the powers and duties comprised in the Office of the Keys. I beg You to grant me Your Holy Spirit that I may prove myself worthy of such honor, and faithfully fulfill such obligations on my humble part, that Your holy name may be praised on earth to the salvation of many. Amen.

Hymn 426, 9.

This is the power of holy keys,
It binds and doth again release;
The Church retains them at her side,
Our mother and Christ's holy bride.

SATURDAY.

God hath set some in the Church . . . teachers.

– 1 Corinthians 12:28.

If, as we saw yesterday, the Office of the Keys is vested in the Christian congregation, and all the powers connected with it, what, then, is a *pastor*? In a Christian congregation the Office of the Keys must be administered in public, the Gospel must be preached, Baptism and the Lord's Supper must be administered, sin must be

remitted and retained. It is evident that not all members can do this in the same manner.

Therefore God has ordained that each congregation should choose and call a man who is to perform the functions of the Office of the Keys publicly, in the name of the congregation and in its midst. Such a man is called pastor, shepherd, bishop, teacher. When he has accepted the call of the congregation, it is God Himself that has given him to that congregation, as our text shows. He then is the steward of the mysteries of God, as far as his public office in the congregation is concerned. (2 Corinthians 4:1.)

This, his stewardship, he has received from God through the congregation. But the instructions, the directions for his stewardship of the Office of the Keys, he has received from God alone. For the functions of the Office of the Keys are ordained by God: no man is permitted to alter them in the least.

If a pastor does not adhere to the divine instructions, or if it becomes evident that he is a wicked man, then, after due admonition, the congregation should remove him. But if he does adhere to the divine instructions; if he preaches the Gospel in its truth and purity; if he administers the Sacraments according to the institution of Christ; if he forgives and retains sins according to the regulations which God has laid down; and if he leads a Christian life, – then the congregation should know that God has given her that man to feed it, and he himself should also be well aware at all times that God has appointed him to serve that congregation. (Acts 20:28.)

It is a great and gracious gift of God for a Christian congregation to have a faithful pastor and teacher.

PRAYER. – Lord, my God, I pray You that You would at all times give us, Your Christians and Your children, upright teachers and ministers of Your divine Word, and keep them in purity of doctrine and rectitude of a Christian life. Bless them in their office,

and bless their faithful labors, that through their Gospel ministry our faith may be strengthened, and every good work prosper among us. And give to me and to my brethren and sisters in the congregation Your Holy Spirit, that we may willingly accept and receive whatever they preach to us out of Your revealed Word. Amen.

Hymn 491, 1. 2. 3.

Lord of the harvest, hear
Thy needy servants' cry;
Answer our faith's effectual prayer,
And all our wants supply.

On Thee we humbly wait,
Our wants are in Thy view:
The harvest, truly, Lord, is great,
The laborers are few.

Convert and send forth more
Into Thy Church abroad,
And let them speak Thy Word of power,
As workers with their God.

These devotions are adapted from *Crumbs* by C. M. Zorn (1914).
The hymn stanzas are from *Evangelical Lutheran Hymn-Book* (1918).
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