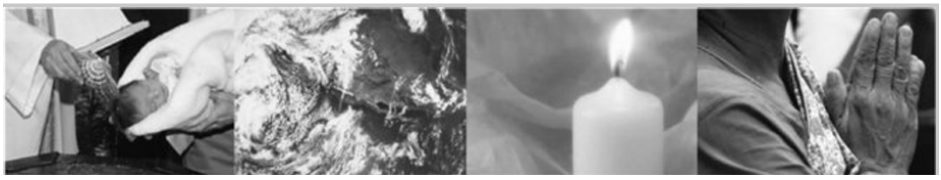
A Spirituality of Healing: Lent – Recreated by the Lord, Living in the Spirit through our Baptism



As we prepare for the beginning of the Lenten Season, we ready ourselves to enter into the very life of God in a very intimate way by participating in and experiencing the sacraments. The sacraments are beautiful pathways into our Lenten journey celebrated by the Church as they are signs of grace that provide a deeper reality of God's presence within and around us. One reality we encounter through the sacraments is Christ's presence in the Church community, His body. This recognition of Christ's presence in the community should lead to a stronger awareness of being sent on mission to engage in love-inspired action in the world. As Pope Benedict XVI noted in Deus Caritas Est (*God is Love*), the celebration of the sacraments and the ministry of love are "inseparable." Love in action, he says, is "an indispensable expression" of the Church's being (25). We begin this Lenten Season with our understanding that the first sacrament received as a young child or through the rite of initiation into the Christian community as a youth or as an adult, offers us intimate access to a personal loving God. Like at our Baptism, during Lent, we are given the opportunity to become renewed as the Divine washes over us and recreates us. As you read further and during this Lent, consider the meaning of your own baptism, your membership in the community, and the mission on which you are sent. Lenten Blessings, *Fr. John*

Baptism makes us "members of one another." Since the time of early Christianity, Baptism has been the rite of initiation into the Christian community of the Church. In Baptism, the "one Spirit" makes us members of the Body of Christ and of "one another" (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1267). Pope St. John Paul II described the result of Baptism as a "mystical unity" between Christ and His disciples, and the disciples with one another, like "branches of a single vine." This reflects the mystical communion of the Holy Trinity (Christifidelis Laici 12).

Baptism reveals the equality and dignity of each member of the community. In the one body of Christ, all the members share "a common dignity" so that "no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex" exists, for all are one in Christ (Lumen Gentium 32). During the rite of Baptism, we reject sin, renouncing those beliefs, values, and choices that are opposed to Christ. We also reject sinful attitudes that degrade the dignity of others (e.g., racism, sexism, etc.) and practices that prevent other members of our human family from living in dignity (e.g., abortion, policies that hurt the poor, etc.).

Baptism calls us to reject death and embrace life and dignity for all. Lent is a sacred time to recommit ourselves to our Baptismal vows.

Baptism invites us to a vocation of holiness and the practice of charity. In Baptism, we receive a "vocation to holiness," which is "intimately connected" to our membership in the "Communion of Saints," which strives to make present the "Kingdom of God in History." Participation in the Communion of Saints requires a commitment to communion with Christ and "a life of charity" in "this world and the next" (Christifidelis Laici 17-18). In the Lenten season, Our Lord helps us to live this type of life more fully.

Baptism incorporates us into the life, death and resurrection of Christ (The Paschal Mystery) and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the world. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church reminds us, "By Baptism, the laity are incorporated into Christ and are made participants in His life and mission" (541). The triple immersion in the baptismal water signifies the death of sin and entry into the newness of life through Christ's death and resurrection. The oil signifies anointing by the Holy Spirit and receiving of the Holy Spirit's gifts. The Holy Spirit helps us to imitate Jesus' self-sacrificial love and allows us to share in the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. The baptized are called to imitate Jesus' example and strive in thought, word, and action to live His love. This means working to heal the wounds of sin, living the beatitudes, practicing the twofold commandment of love of God and neighbor, and imitating the lives of the Saints (Catechism 1694-97). Having been anointed by the Spirit, "Christians can repeat in an individual way the words of Jesus: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord' … (Lk. 4:18)" (Christifidelis Laici 13). One of the first gestures enacted by the priest or deacon at our Baptism is the tracing of the cross on our foreheads as he claims us for Christ. At the beginning of Lent, when we receive the ashes on our foreheads, we are reminded of His life giving sacrifice and the self-sacrifice we are called to offer as well. In a papal audience in 2010, Pope Benedict proclaimed – "[We are] made in God's image and [are] seen as precious dust in God's eyes." The Pope further stated, ". Our current Pontiff, Francis, reminds us that the simple action of the imposition of ashes reveals to us the unique riches of its meaning. Lent is a divine invitation to a more conscious and intense immersion in Christ's Pascal Mystery, remembering that we are baptized in the death and resurrection of Our Lord. The Ancients knew that Ashes brought Life as they often used them to prepare themselves for a renewal of self and community. We have hope for the future of the Church, for in our own ashes, life can be found. Our Holy Father states further, "hope is like embers under the ashes; let us help each other [in] solidarity [by] blowing [on] the ashes to rekindle the flame. The sign of the cross in ashes "carries us onward -- **hope** does not

belong to any one person; we all create **hope**!" In communion with Christ, in communion with each other, as a priestly people moving forward in a common Baptism, in this Jubilee of Hope, this Year of Healing, as a sacramental people, **let us proceed together into this Sacred Journey of Lent.**