

✠ Joshua 3:1-17 ✠

IN NOMINE IESU

And Joshua commanded the people, saying, “Come here and listen to the words of the Lord your God ... Behold, the ark of the covenant, the Lord of all the earth is passing before you into the Jordan ... [and He] shall rest in the waters of the Jordan” (Joshua 3:9-13). Here God gives us a wonderful picture of Baptism and the Christian Church.

First of all, Joshua does not exalt himself even though the people knew that Moses had laid his hands on Joshua and blessed him with his own mantle in much the same way that Elijah would put his mantle upon Elisha many years hence. But rather, God exalts Joshua in His time and in the way that would bring Him the most glory and honor. He exalts Joshua in the crossing of the Jordan where it is clear that not Joshua nor the people of Israel, nor even the Levitical priests could have done what was done. But the crossing was only and completely the work of the Lord.

In this same way, our Joshua, Jesus Christ, is exalted by God in the holy waters of Baptism when His name is placed upon His chosen people, His Church. For only the Christian Church worships and glorifies the Son of God as the Anointed One of God, worthy of all honor and glory. For the heathen, no matter how pious and good he may appear to be, does not and cannot exalt the name of Jesus because he does not believe and cling to the saving waters of holy Baptism. Only those who believe and are baptized praise the name of Jesus. It is true that there will come a day when all people, heathen and Christian alike will bow bended knee before the Lord of Glory, but that is the final Judgment Day, when the enemies of our Lord will be brought low and will be made as a footstool for His feet (Hebrews 10:13).

For now, as we see the world, the enemies of God, the heathen and all who denounce the Jesus of Holy Scripture, seem to be exalted above our Lord and His Church. But they are not. It would have seemed also that the Jordan River was too much for the people of Israel, but God was with them and stood in the midst of the river, holding back its flood waters and cutting the mouth of the river in the Salt Sea off from its source.

Such a glorious picture of our Lord and His Church should bring great comfort to our hearts and minds. For even though there is trouble all around us, with the devil and all his minions attacking us at ever turn with sickness, disease, natural disasters, doubt, and shame, our Lord stands in the midst of His people, His Church, and holds back all that would kill and harm us until we are safely brought to the other side.

But who would think that sending the priests bearing the ark of the covenant would be enough to part the waters and let the people pass over unharmed and dry? Rather should not elaborate bridges or deep tunnels be built and constructed? Should they not have sought another way around, perhaps finding a low point in the river to cross over? True, they would be wet and in danger of the current, but it makes more sense. Or should not have boats or rafts been constructed to carry them across the river?

Such questions are paralleled when we ask if Baptism can really be enough. Can it be true

that the common element of water poured over our heads really does bring us safely through death into life? Certainly not, if the Word of God is not attached to the water. In the same way, it was not the priests carrying the ark into the Jordan that caused the waters to recede and hold their course, but it was the Word of God that caused such a great miracle. For without God's Word, the Jordan would have obeyed His first command which commanded the river to flow into the Salt Sea. But now, at His command, the waters stayed back and the ground beneath the waters dried up.

The priests with the ark of the covenant were a sign that God was there among His people. God could certainly have parted the Jordan without the ark or the priests, but He chose to do it this way so that people would see and believe that it was the living God of Moses and Joshua that caused such a great thing. Therefore, had the priests themselves doubted yet still set foot in the waters, they would have parted because of God's command and promise, which does not depend upon man but upon the will of God.

So too with Baptism. Water without the Word of God is plain water and no Baptism. But with the Word of God, that is, with the command of God and the promise of God, it is a Baptism. It has the power to save and to bring its recipient into the ark of salvation, the holy catholic Church. And the command of God does not diminish with time. No matter how long ago or at what age you were baptized, it is still God's command and promise. Just as it took a long time for the people to cross the Jordan, yet the river stayed back until they were all safely across.

Thus do we live in our baptism. It is true that in Baptism God saves you, and it is equally true that God gives you a sign of your salvation with the water being poured over your head in the name of God. So baptism is both the sign and accomplishment of salvation just as the priests and the ark in the parted Jordan was both the sign that God was with His people and the accomplishment of their crossing over on dry ground. It is not as if you were washed once long ago and now it means nothing but is merely a nicety and remembrance. Rather it is as if you have been baptized every day of your life that you believe the promises in the holy water of the Church's font; that for Christ's sake your sins are forgiven and you are raised with Christ in righteousness and purity.

For in Baptism you confess your sins and receive life. This is the life of the Christian as the dear departed Dr. Luther wrote, "When I exhort you to come to confession, I am merely urging you to be a Christian" (LC, V, Confession, 32). When I encourage you to look to your baptism, I am urging you to be a Christian. For one who has been baptized, believing the promises of Christ, will eagerly and desperately confess their sins, drowning the old Adam in the baptismal waters of the Jordan, and begging for absolution, being brought to the promise land of salvation and grace with Christ Jesus.

For by being baptized into Jesus, the real Joshua, we know that the living God is among us.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠