

The theme for this morning's meditation is, 'Baptism and the Lord's Supper.' These are two Sacraments that the Church of North India follows because these were instituted by the Lord Jesus himself. What do these two Sacraments symbolize for us? Baptism is symbolic of dying with Christ and rising with Christ. The root word is '*baptidzo*' which means 'I dip'. In the physical act of baptism water is sprinkled on a child or an adult is immersed, and this is symbolic of dying to our sinful self and rising with Christ.

Three images help us to understand baptism: the first image is that of grafting. In this we see that every believer is grafted on to the body of Christ. The second image is that of adoption. In this image it is the parents who take the initiative in adopting the child. Similarly, God always takes the initiative in drawing us to himself. The third imagery is that of new birth. Here again we see that just as the infant does not take the decision where or when he/she should be born, likewise God is the giver of new birth. Baptism seals us as members of the body Christ.

The second Sacrament which the Lord Jesus instituted is the Lord's Supper. In the Gospel reading John records Jesus saying that he is the bread of life who comes down from heaven which people may eat and not die. Jesus is in other words saying that whoever believes in him has eternal life. Jesus has already spoken about eternal life in the Nicodemus incident (John 3: 15-16), that whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life; and in the Samaritan woman's incident (John 4:14), where rivers of water will flow leading to eternal life. Personal belief on Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world is what eternal life is. Jesus then claims that he is the bread of life and the living bread. By saying this Jesus shows that he is the one who offers us life and will also be able to sustain us spiritually. The person of Jesus received by faith is the means by which eternal life is given and sustained. Jesus says that 'this bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world.' The Jews misunderstood Jesus and wonder how anyone could eat the body of Jesus, and so begin to argue among themselves sharply. This is again one of John's techniques by presenting a misunderstanding followed by a clarification: with Nicodemus how can an old man be born again in his mother's womb? With the Samaritan woman, Sir, 'give me this water so that I do not have to come here again'. And here, 'how can this man give us this flesh to eat'.

All of them were thinking purely on the physical level and so the Jews were thinking of a literal eating of his flesh which would amount to cannibalism. Jesus was talking about the spiritual realm where 'flesh' was a reference to his suffering and death. Jesus says 'Very truly I tell you; unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink'. The body and the blood are symbolic of Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension. The incarnate Son of God and his work is essential for any individual to have eternal life.

The body and blood are symbols that we use in the Eucharist. We believe that Christ died for us. At baptism we symbolically go through the waters and come out of it signifying our union with the death and resurrection of Christ. Baptism shows us that we have begun this journey of faith, but this journey needs to be sustained. In the Lord's Supper we appropriate his death for the forgiveness of our sins and we sustain ourselves as we partake of it. Jesus encourages us to feed on him as the bread of life and to remain in him continuously until the Day of Judgment.

Those who have put their personal trust in Jesus and have appropriated his forgiveness will be vindicated on the Day of Judgment. Eternal life begins here and now when we put our trust in Christ. This life can only be sustained as we remain in him and he in us.

May we remain in Christ through his Word and Sacraments.

Shalom

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