

Station Four Reflection: Baptism

Baptism is one of the most ancient rituals in the Christian tradition. Over the two millennia of Christianity, many, many thinkers and preachers have layered lots of different symbolic meanings on this ritual. But one of the oldest understandings of what Baptism is about is the view that in Baptism the candidate is being joined with Christ's own death and resurrection.

What does that mean? It means that as the candidate enters the water of baptism, they are letting go of and releasing certain aspects of themselves. The baptized are no longer known as "children of the world": they no longer fight for dominance, power, and prestige...they no longer other-ize people who they disagree with or come from a different country, ethnicity, or race...they no longer seek one's own happiness at the expense of one's neighbor.

The Christian tradition calls this letting go a kind of death. But there is not only death in baptism, there is also resurrection. This is symbolized by the oil, the chrism. The Chrism oil is oil that has been blessed by a Bishop, it has a fragrant smell, and it is a symbol of blessedness. The tradition of anointing with oil goes back to the Old Testament prophets who anoint with oil those who God has shown favor to.

In the ritual of Baptism, the candidate is no longer a "child of the world" and they become a "child of God": now they will seek and serve Christ in all persons...now they will love their neighbors as themselves...now they will strive for justice and peace among all people.

Obviously, this is not a one-time thing. While in the Episcopal Church, like many others, our practice is to only baptize a person once in their life...the great theologian Martin Luther reminds us that we need to remember our baptism daily. In fact, that's another way of understanding what Lent is all about. Lent is a time to reflect upon baptism as we prepare for the Easter mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. In fact, in the early Church, Baptisms were expected at the Easter celebration, and candidates for baptism would spend Lent doing special preparations for that baptism.

So today, at this prayer station, take your stone or shattered pottery. Recall whatever brokenness you spoke into it, that it is symbolizing for you. And when you are ready, place it in the water. Watch it as it sinks to the bottom. Take a moment and let it be buried.

Then take a Q-tip and dip it in the Chrism oil provided. Bring the oil to your face and smell it. Let the rich scent be a promise to you that one day all brokenness shall be healed, reconciled, and forgiven.