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Pastor's Column

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“Baptism: A ‘Cleansing’ Or A ‘Drowning’?”

These thoughts are taken from “The Little Black Book: Six-Minute Reflections on the Passion according to Matthew” published by the Diocese of Saginaw, Michigan:

Lent got started in the first place because of Baptism. It was an intense period of spiritual exercises for adults in their last stages of preparation for Baptism. The community prayed for them, and they fasted too, and gave alms, and spent time pondering the implications of their own Baptism.

The Jews practiced many kinds of water purifications. Priests washed themselves ritually before exercising sacred functions. People had to be purified with water after they touched a corpse, bones, or a tomb. Some Jewish leaders required a ritual washing before eating.

The first thing to say about Baptism is that it is very different from these ritual cleansings. The Jewish washing rituals were self-administered, and could be repeated many times. Christian Baptism, on the other hand, is administered by another person, and is once-in-a-lifetime.

Most of all, Baptism is not primarily a washing, but an immersion into water. The Greek words used to describe Jewish purification rituals mean to “wash” or “sprinkle.” On the other hand, “baptism” comes from a Greek word that means “to plunge” – for example, plunging cloth into dye, or to become submerged in water and drown.

At the heart of Christian baptism is dying (“drowning”) to one way of living and rising to a new way of life.

As Disciples of the Lord Jesus, we are “cloth dyed in Christ.” Is the color still brilliant or are we fading? What practices, habits, people, activities are taking the color of Christ out of us? To what do we need to say “no”? And to what do we need to say “yes”?

Let us take advantage of this Season of Lent, following the example of our Catechumens who will be taking the plunge at the Easter Vigil. (On Saturday, April 15, 2006)

This is our time of renewal!

Fr. Mike