



Living with Christ: Why Easter Matters

Bible verses: Romans 6:3-11

Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection. We know that our old self was crucified with him, so that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin. For a dead person has been absolved from sin. If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him. As to his death, he died to sin once and for all; as to his life, he lives for God. Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as [being] dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.

Ask everyone in the group to have their Bibles with them. Ask one person to read the passage out loud. Encourage them to have their pens and to underline things that strike them, especially later in the Bible when you go through the key words and phrases. Also, encourage them to make notes.

After the reading of the passage is complete, explain the context.

Context:

When St. Paul wrote this letter to the Christians living in Rome, he had not even visited Rome yet. This was an advance letter that he sent before coming to the church that was in the empire's capital city. In this letter, he wanted to give to them a summary of what he has been teaching. There is a lot of his teaching that is not included in this letter. For example, he doesn't mention his understanding of the Eucharist, or the end times, or of the Church. But what he does give are in-depth answers to these important questions:

What does it mean to be saved?
How do we get saved?
How are we supposed to live as Christians?

Because of that, Romans is probably the most studied book in the New Testament.

The section from this book that was just read relates to the role of Baptism in answering those three questions above. If you watched the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday, this is the reading you heard just before the Gospel was read. It is the New Testament reading that focuses the Church as it gets ready to baptize new Christians.

Yes, it provides a theology of Baptism, but is also shows something else. It reveals that the sacraments were part of the Church's life from the very beginning. There is an assumption that everyone reading the letter or hearing it being read has been baptized. That means that baptism was part of the preaching that first brought people to believe in Jesus.

After explaining the context, ask some to read the passage to the group again. When the reader has finished, go back through and highlight the key words and phrases found below.

Key New Testament Words and Phrases:

- *Were baptized:* Found in Romans 6:3, the Greek word "ebaptisthēmen" (eh-BAP-tis-THEE-men) has "baptisai" as its root. It literally means to be "submerged into".
- *Grown into union with him:* Found in Romans 6:5, the Greek word is "symphytoi" (SOOM-foo-toy). It means to be "closely united to" and "grow together" just as a branch is grafted onto a tree.
- *Resurrection:* Found in Romans 6:5, the Greek word is "anastaseōs" (ahn-ah-STAH-see-ohs). It means to physically rouse and "to stand up."
- *We shall also live with:* Found in Romans 6:8, the Greek word is "syzēsomen" (soo-zee-SOH-men). It means to continue to live in common with, to "co-survive."
- *Death no longer has power over him:* Found in Romans 6:9, the phrase in Greek is "thanatos autou ouketi kyrieuei" (than-AH-tohs OW-too OO-keh-tee KOOR-ee-oy-ay). "Kyrieuei" has "kyrie" as its root, which is the word for Lord. Death then is not Lord over those who have been raised with Christ.

Now you may provide the following interpretation.

Interpretation:

Even though he was God, Jesus submerged himself into our life as humans. He suffered, he died, and he rose. That is the same for us. At every point in our life, we are either suffering, dying, or rising. In suffering, we are experiencing something that we just want to be over with. We may not feel like praying and God can feel far away.

In dying, things are changing. We may be changing as people. Our circumstances may be changing or something may be going away. What makes these times of "dying" so hard is the fact that we may not know what is coming next. This can be like the days that Jesus spent in the tomb. The old ways or the old life that we knew has gone away, but we don't know what is going to come next.

We are always either suffering, dying, or rising. When we are rising is when new things are coming to us in life. We feel like we are close to God and that he is hearing us when we pray.

No matter if we are suffering, dying, or rising, we are to submerge our self into Christ just as he submerged himself to us. We are to join him as a branch is grafted onto a tree and grow with him. In joining ourselves to him, his destiny becomes our destiny and we will live forever because our own death has been defeated. In Baptism, Confirmation, and at every Eucharist, the invitation to join him is extended to us. And just as branch grows on a tree, we are to grow to be more like Christ because we are a part of him and he is a part of us.

What will we do? Will we say to God, "not my will be done, but may your will be done"? Baptism and the renewal of our baptismal vows is the place where we are invited to join Jesus. This is the time where we joined to him and his destiny becomes our destiny. Jesus lived and he died. We have no choice. We will live and we will die. The question is posed to us, "Will you unite yourself to the full destiny of Jesus that includes his resurrection and his victory over sin and death?" That is what is presented to us in the waters of Baptism. Through Lent, Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday, we heard the story of Jesus. Now, will our own personal story be joined to his?

Application to Real Life:

- If you had to choose one from among the three descriptions, what do you think is happening in your life right now? Are you suffering, dying, or rising? Why did you answer the way you did?
- Do you feel like you're growing with Christ right now, do you feel stuck, or do you feel like your life in Christ is shrinking? Why did you answer the way you did?
- Is your life bearing fruit? Do you think other people can tell that you're a Christian?
- Paul is telling the Romans that those who have died with Christ have died to sin. Does it ever feel that there are parts of your life where there's sin that just won't die?
- Do you feel like you could use a time to intentionally set your heart and mind to follow Christ again?

Closing Prayer:

Ask someone else to read Roman 6:3-11 for a final time and then pray the following prayer.

Leader: Dear brothers and sisters, through the Paschal Mystery we have been buried with Christ in Baptism, so that we may walk with him in newness of life.

And so, now that our Lenten observance is concluded,
let us renew the promises of Holy Baptism,
by which we once renounced Satan and his works
and promised to serve God in the holy Catholic Church.

Leader: Do you reject Satan?

All: I do.

Leader: And all his works?

All: I do.

Leader: And all his empty promises?

All: I do.

Leader: Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth?

All: I do.

Leader: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of
the Virgin Mary was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead,
and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?

All: I do.

Leader: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic church, the communion
of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life
everlasting?

All: I do.

Leader: God, the all-powerful Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has given us a new
birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and forgiven all our sins. May he also
keep us faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ for ever and ever.

All: Amen.