

## Growing in Grace #1—Baptism and Faith

According to the scriptures, Jesus talked about entering a Kingdom. St Paul taught that each of us was to know Jesus, and to become like Him.

In my books, I interpret all that as becoming the person that God wants you to be—and that in our human terms is like growing. We are not to be static, but to grow spiritually, like we grow physically. To grow in God' Grace is to grow spiritually into a spiritual adult, to grow into the Saints that Jesus calls us to become. If Lent is a time to change and grow, then it is a good time to focus on what that growth can mean for each of us.

In our physical life, our beginning is our birth. We start off as a baby, and through the years, we grow physically and mentally. Our goal is to become an adult, able to think, choose, love, as well as to walk, run, and care for others.

So, in our spiritual life, we need to begin—to be born spiritually—to start a new relationship with God. We do that in our Baptism.

Being Baptised is the moment when God adopts us and makes us His own. Most of the time, we are still babies in the flesh, and it is our parents who bring us to the Church, to God, and ask Him to adopt us, and to begin our spiritual life. The priest pours water on our head, with the words “I baptise you in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Then the priest anoints us with Holy Oil in the form of a cross on our forehead. Our parents make promises to teach us about the Lord, and to bring us into the Presence of Jesus weekly. And then we go home.

But our Baptism is only half of what is needed.

We also need to come to a personal relationship with Jesus. That is something that God wants, but only we can do. It is the moment in our life when we accept Jesus as our personal Saviour, the one who died on the Cross for us, the one who loves us, and the one who will walk with us for the rest of our life on earth.

In other words, it is like the 2 sides of a coin—Baptism which God does to us, and Faith which we give back to God. If you were Baptised as an adult, you probably accepted Jesus as your Saviour before your Baptism. And in the Baptism service you specifically state that you accept Him as Saviour and Lord. If you were baptised as a child, as I was, there comes a time in your life when you accept Him as Saviour and made your own statement of Faith yourself.

I was baptised as a baby, 5 months after I was born physically. As I grew physically, my parents took me to church, sent me to Sunday School, and shared their Faith with me. By the time I was 12 however, I decided that I knew better, and threw all that out the window. Oh, I thought I was so smart—but by 16 I realized that this universe did not come from nothing, and that there had to be a great Mind who was behind the creation and especially the creation of thinking people. Then by 17, my mother told me I was going to

get Confirmed. And she had worked out where I was to take Confirmation classes. I finally agreed and went. The result was life changing. For the first time, I learned that I was loved by God, that He had sent His Son Jesus to live with us, to teach us and finally to die on a Cross because He loved us so much.

It took several weeks for me to accept all this, and to accept Jesus as my Saviour. But finally, I surrendered myself to Him, and began a new life. My Faith was the completion of my Baptism. It was the beginning of my new life as a Christian, and the beginning of my spiritual growth. Sure, God had been working within me all those years before I accepted Him into my life. In His love, God never forgets us, never deserts us, never punishes us. If you learn anything, you need to know that God loves you, keeps loving you, even when you turn your back on Him, and try to live your life in your own way by yourself. God doesn't stop you, doesn't prevent you from turning to sin—He realizes that we start off pretty selfish and self-centred; but Jesus is always working within us to bring us to Him, in Faith and love.

I imagine that each of you has come to Jesus in your own way. Each of you has turned in Faith to the God who loves you. We are all different, so the starting point of Faith is different for each of us. But it is always to Jesus our Saviour, the One who has never stopped loving us, the one who gave His life for us, the One who rose on that first Easter Day, and after founding the Church, ascended into Heaven, where He is offering Himself to the Father for our forgiveness, and prays for us every day.

So, I pray many times each day the following: "Jesus my Lord I thee adore, oh help me Love you more and more."

See if you can find a simple prayer like that, which you can say many times throughout the day. Each time you do so, you will be bringing yourself into His Presence, a Presence that is always there, and reminding you of His love for you.

Amen