

**Second Sunday of Advent
Lectionary: 5**

Reading 1: IS 40:1-5, 9-11

Responsorial Psalm: PS 85:9-10-11-12, 13-14

Reading 2: 2 PT 3:8-14

Alleluia: LK 3:4, 6

Gospel: MK 1:1-8

We hear in the Gospel of Mark how John the Baptist already baptized those who repented of their sins. So, did baptism already exist as we know it today?

How was baptism in the Old Testament understood?

For Jews, water has always been an important element of life and purification. Throughout the Holy Scriptures there are mentions of this important element.

For example, the book of Exodus 29: 4 mentions that Aaron and his sons, before dressing themselves in priestly vestments, should be washed with water. In the book of Kings, we hear the beautiful story of how Naaman immersed himself 7 times in the water of the Jordan River by orders of the prophet Elisha. Instantly his body is cleansed of leprosy. (2 Kings 5: 1-20)

The ritual bath for the Israelites means the purification of the body, the beginning of a new stage, the new birth, transferring something from one owner to another, as in the case of the ritual washing of the food utensils that were made by a non-Jew, they are washed (submerged) so that they become the property of the Jew, as it is written: "everything that resists fire, by fire you will make it pass through, and it will be clean, well that in the waters of purification it will be purified; and you shall pass through water all that does not withstand the fire "(Numbers 31:23).

David spoke of washing his hands in the sense of having them morally clean in order to worship before the altar of Yahweh. (Ps.26:6) On the other hand, Pontius Pilate tried pointlessly to cleanse himself of guilt for bloodshed in connection with

Jesus' death by washing his hands before the people. But in this way he was not free of responsibility for the death of Jesus, since he was the one who had the authority to dictate sentence, not the vociferous rabble. (Mt. 27:24.)

The scribes and Pharisees of the first century gave great importance to the act of washing their hands, and criticized that the disciples of Jesus Christ transgressed the traditions of men of "other times" by not washing their hands when they went to take a meal.

It was not just about washing your hands normally for sanitization, it was a ceremonial ritual. "The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands to the elbow." (Mk. 7: 2-5; Mt. 15: 2)

Christ, who has not come to abolish the law but to give it fulfillment, continues with those rites of purification. We are baptized in the New Covenant, our body is free from original sin but not from the tendency to sin. Every time we enter into Church, one of the first things we do is to sanctify ourselves with holy water. The priest before the Consecration washes his hands.

The washing of the hands in the Mass, after preparing the Eucharistic gifts on the altar, is not for hygienic value, since it is unnecessary, but spiritual and symbolic. The washing of the hands helps both the priest and the faithful to dispose themselves interiorly, with a pure heart for the Eucharistic sacrifice. It is the explanation offered by St. Cyril of Jerusalem in his Catechesis:

"You have seen how the deacon reached the water, to wash his hands, and the priest who were around the altar. But in no way did he do it to cleanse the body dirt. I say that was not the reason, because at the beginning we did not come to the Church because we had stains on our bodies. However, the washing of the hands is a symbol that you must be cleansed of all sins. And as the hands are the symbol of the action, when we wash them, we mean the purity of the works and the fact that they are free from all blame. (Catechesis Mistagógica V, 2).

In Psalm 51 we find the perfect prayer of repentance and trust in Gods Mercy, "Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will

be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

This is our goal in Advent, to have a pure heart and a steadfast spirit. This is how we prepare ourselves for Christmas.