

Homily based on the readings from April 13, 2026 (Acts 4.23-31; John 3.1-8)

From the earliest days of the Church, there has been an essential bond between the season of Easter and the Sacrament of Baptism. If you have ever attended the Easter Vigil – the pinnacle of the Church’s liturgical year – you will know that the numerous readings and prayers during the first half of the Mass lead up to a single culminating event: the baptism of the catechumens who are entering the Church. Even at the relatively brief Masses on Easter Sunday, it is common for the entire congregation to renew their baptismal promises.

Although it makes sense to receive new members into the Church at the most prominent event of the year, this connection is more than just a matter of practicality. At a basic level, Baptism constitutes our own participation in the Easter mysteries. While the symbolism may not be as obvious when we are not fully immersed, the *plunge* – which is what *baptism* literally means – fundamentally represents the experience of

going down into the grave. In *rising* from the font, we are likewise sharing in Christ's wondrous rebirth. As Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, writing in the fourth century, explained to a group of newly baptized Christians:

You were led down to the font of holy baptism just as Christ was taken down from the cross and placed in the tomb You made the profession of faith that brings salvation, you were plunged into the water, and three times you rose again. This symbolized the three days Christ spent in the tomb. ... So when you were immersed in the water it was like night for you and you could not see, but when you rose again it was like coming into broad daylight. In the same instant you died and were born again; the saving water was both your tomb and your mother.

Anyone who is baptized, whether an infant or an adult, emerges from the water "a new creation" – a partaker in Christ's triumphant victory over death.

Today's Gospel reading, from early in the Gospel of John, represents one of Jesus' most direct statements about the nature and necessity of Baptism:

Amen, amen, I say to you,
unless one is born of water and Spirit
he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.
What is born of flesh is flesh
and what is born of spirit is spirit.

Even though his death and Resurrection were still at least two years in the future, Christ was already inviting his followers to participate in the glories of Easter. Two thousand years later, that same invitation remains open. Even if most of us were too young to remember the actual *event* of our baptism, we must *never* forget the incomparable gift we have been given – which, as his faithful disciples, we are commanded and commissioned to share with any of our brothers and sisters who are willing to receive it.