

Holy Trinity  
Matthew 28: 16-20

The risen Jesus' final words to his friends in Galilee have echoed through the centuries of the Church. Make disciples of all nations; baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; teach them to observe all that I have commanded.

This is the Church's mission. It has been our work for almost 2000 years.

We have been making disciples across the world. Our presence here today is proof. We're thousands of miles from Christianity's cradle, in a place Jesus' first followers could not have imagined in their wildest dreams. And the churches are still growing—fastest in sub Saharan Africa.

It is true that we are not yet united in the way our Lord would want. But hope is not gone—too many people are working at every level of the ecumenical movement, for us to give up on the promise of being one church.

We have been passing the teachings of Jesus on to new generations of Christians. From family prayers and parish Sunday schools to papal encyclicals, the Word that is Christ is still a living Word.

But we struggle. How do we interpret Christ's great commandment to love God and neighbor? As Catholics we depend upon our pope and bishops to guide us. In turn, they listen to the lived experience of the Christian people, examining it in light of the wisdom of our saints.

Jesus also told his disciples to baptize. It is baptism that makes the rest of the mission possible.

We can see from today's gospel that Christians have been baptizing in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit almost from the beginning. There are other baptismal formulas in the New Testament, but this is the one that has lasted. This is the one that unites all Jesus' followers. When someone comes to the Catholic Church from another Christian denomination, for instance, they are never re-baptized.

So—baptism is rather important. All of our participants in baptism preparation classes agree that this sacrament is the way into the family that is the Church. But there are some things that baptism is not.

It's not the spiritual equivalent of childhood inoculations. You know, one more thing to get done, along with visits to the pediatrician. It's not that at all. The Catholic Church does believe that Jesus saves the unbaptized. Earlier this year I read funeral

prayers for a baby who had not been baptized. Every word of those prayers—every word—spoke of our belief that this little person is with God.

And baptism is in no way a provisional sacrament. We're baptizing our baby now, to welcome him or her into the church, but he or she can decide about remaining Christian at a later date. Baptism is the same sacrament whether the candidate is an adult or a child. It's a solemn and serious commitment to Christian discipleship. It's the entry into a relationship as sacred as marriage.

Baptism is much more than the moment when the water is poured or the candidate is immersed. St. Paul called the church the body of Christ. He was right. With baptism we become a part of that body. We are joined to Christ and to all other Christians in a community that transcends both time and place. We can rightfully say that we are as close to faithful Christians in 4<sup>th</sup> century North Africa, for example, as we are to each other in this building.

And what is the purpose of the Christian community? It's to carry on the mission that Jesus gave us—to make new disciples, to teach what he commanded and to baptize. The baptismal rite for young children states that Christ was anointed priest, prophet and king. It strongly implies, at this point, that the newly baptized is also a priest, a prophet and a leader, in whatever way God is calling him or her to be. I was very impressed with the comment made about Pope John XXIII. The greatest day of his life was not the day he was elected pope. Nor was it the day he was ordained a priest. It was the day of his baptism. For it was then that he was commissioned to do God's work.

There are nine children being baptized at Assumption today. This is good news that should bring us joy. Nine more disciples of Jesus, ready for mission. Let us not take these baptisms for granted. Let us pray that these children will cherish the body of which they are a part and be faithful to whatever God calls them to be.

I've been talking about the church as body of Christ and as community. But there is a greater community, to which this Sunday's worship is dedicated. Traditionally we have said that the Holy Spirit represents the love between God the Father and God the Son. God is also community—a community of absolute love. But God is not an enclosed community. God does not have boundaries.

The best known icon of the Trinity has three angelic figures seated on three sides of a table. The side closest to the viewer is empty. We are invited to be seated there. We are invited to share in the divine life and love of God. By accepting wholeheartedly the words of Jesus in today's gospel, we will be saying yes to this incredible invitation.

Amen.