

Ask Fr. James

We Confess One Baptism for the Forgiveness of Sins

This is what we pray every time in the Nicene Creed. This statement is one of the core beliefs of all of us Christians. We confess "*One Baptism*" reminds us that Baptism is the "door" of faith and of Christian life and can only be received once. Baptism is the identity card of the Christian, it is our church birth certificate and the act of our birth into the Church. It is helpful to remember the date of one's Baptism and give thanks to the Lord, because at Baptism God opened the door of his Church to us.

"For the forgiveness of sin" means Baptism washes away sins so that one becomes a new person and demonic forces are drowned in the waters. Water baptism using the Trinitarian formula is an act of cleansing and reception into the Christian community. What we believe is that at his baptism Jesus received the Spirit. The heavens were opened and 'the Holy Spirit came down upon him.' A voice from the heavens thundered and said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am pleased' [Luke 3:22]. The heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit came down for the forgiveness of the whole world's sins. After the Lord 'ascended on high, he gave us the Spirit. The Spirit had come to him, and he gave the Spirit at the time of his resurrection when he said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they will be forgiven' [John 20:22-23]. God forgives to save human beings who are diminished and trapped by their own evil.

The word "Baptism" literally means "immersion. *It is called a Sacrament* because it constitutes a true spiritual immersion in the death of Christ, from which one rises with Him like a new creation (cf. Rom 6:4). All the churches agree on the institution of baptism through Jesus Christ and agree on the meaning of baptism as "Participation in Christ's Death and Resurrection," as "Conversion, Pardoning and Cleansing," as "Gift of the Spirit," as "Incorporation into the Body of Christ," and as "Sign of the Kingdom." At the same time, Baptism is tied to our faith in the remission of sins. The Sacrament of Penance or Confession is, in fact, like a "second baptism" that refers back always to the first to strengthen and renew it. When we go to confess our weaknesses, our sins, we go to ask the pardon of Jesus, but we also go to renew our Baptism through his forgiveness.

We Confess One Baptism for the Forgiveness of Sins is also the basic principle of Ecumenism." It reminds us of the need to recognize the baptism of other non-Catholic Churches, for we all have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." (Ephesians 4:5). But, does this mean we need to have one and the same understanding of baptism? The same understanding; yes, but practice of baptism may be different. Some churches practice "children baptism," or "infant baptism" and other practice "believers' baptism" or "adult baptism" and others also practice immersion or pouring "water baptism" and "Spirit baptism," etc. This means, we have a mutual recognition of baptism and we avoid practices which can be understood as a second baptism.