

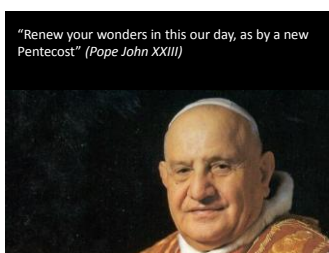
Happy New Year! This is the 40th Anniversary year of the Alton Day of Renewal.

First of all a brief history

How did Alton day of renewal originate – and for that matter, what is renewal in the Holy Spirit?



The Church began when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. Then, as now, the Holy Spirit empowers Christians to live as Jesus taught and to share His Good News. However, over the centuries, ordinary Christians had come to think that holiness and the gifts of the Holy Spirit were only for certain people. But over the last century, God has been restoring the use of all of his gifts throughout the entire Church, particularly the *charisms* or gifts of service and power. This renewal of lives with the Holy Spirit has become known as the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.



At the very beginning of the 20th Century Pope Leo XIII prayed for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and this was repeated by Pope John XXIII in the 1960s. Catholic Charismatic renewal began in Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (USA) in February 1967. In the 1970's it spread from America to England. Prayer groups were springing up and praying for the Lord to convert our lives and hearts, to renew our spiritual life and follow Christ in the power of the Spirit of God dwelling in us from our baptism and to fan into a flame the gifts given to us at confirmation for the building of

the Church and the spreading of the Gospel.



In November 1974 a Fr Coogan in Basingstoke started a prayer group in the home of Ron and Margaret Nicholls every Thursday evening. They were soon joined by a group of nuns and other laity, following the book of Life in the Spirit Seminars each week. Soon after the conclusion of the seminars, when they had prayed for a new anointing of the Holy Spirit, they started holding a monthly day of renewal structured around talks, workshops, prayer and praise. The first was held in Basingstoke in St Joseph's parish.

The following two months the Day was held in two different parishes in Southampton. At the second of these, Mary Tanner (a pioneer of Catholic renewal in this country) spoke of her childhood, how she was told by Jesus about a movement of the Spirit that would spread throughout the world. (Which of course is exactly what has been happening.



In less than 50 years Renewal in the Holy Spirit has touched over 120 million Catholics around the world).

Another speaker and pioneer of renewal, Bob Balkam, gave a prophecy that the Day of Renewal would have a permanent home. This was soon established at Alton Convent in 1975. Attendance grew to around 300-400 until a large group that came up from Southampton and Portsmouth set up their own Day in Southampton. In 1998, the Alton Day of Renewal found a new home here at St. Lucy's Convent, Medstead.



Part of Alton Day of Renewal's original covenant with the Lord was that, should we ever have three consecutive monthly meetings without the Lord sending us someone who was new to the day, we would take it as a sign that we would have to fundamentally rethink our mission. Thanks be to God, we have never gone three months without someone new joining us.

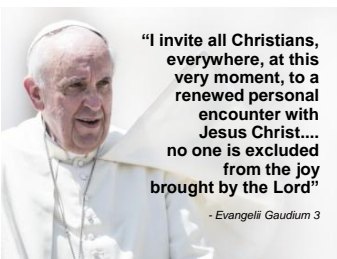
Who am I?



And why am I here giving this talk? I have been attending ADoRE fairly regularly for a few years and leading the praise and worship and giving the occasional talk. A few months ago I was invited to join the Core Team which organises the annual programme, and it was I who came up with the plan for all the talks this year. Deacon John Foley then said – well you might as well be the January speaker, then you can explain the whole theme and set the scene for the year! Thanks John! This has proved to be rather challenging!

In a broader sense, who am I and how have I come to this point? Again, just a very brief sketch – and this is actually not just to satisfy your curiosity, but it is very relevant to the main part of my talk, when I eventually get to it!

I am married to Jenny and this year it is our 42nd anniversary. We have a son and daughter both married and living near us; both have given us a grandson recently. I have been a Catholic all my life. I hesitate to say I AM a cradle Catholic... I was a cradle Catholic until my 30's when I finally got out of the cradle and stood on my own 2 feet! That's when I eventually made a personal commitment to my Faith and did what Pope Francis is now encouraging all Catholics to do in *Evangelii Gaudium*:



I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since "no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord". The Lord does not disappoint those who take this risk; whenever we take a step towards Jesus, we come to realize that he is already there, waiting for us with open arms. Now is the time to say to Jesus: "Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a

thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord, take me once more into your redeeming embrace".



Since that time 31 years ago I have endeavoured to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit and he has enabled me to do a number of things as a lay person in our Parish of St Joan of Arc in Farnham. I have led the Prayer Group there for about 24 years; I was a Confirmation catechist for several years; I have arranged numerous faith formation courses including Life in the Spirit seminars, Alpha Courses, Cafe courses and few programmes I originated myself; I have co-ordinated 2 parish missions; I have served on

the Parish Council and the Parish Pastoral Team including time as Chairman; I am a Eucharistic Minister, a worship leader, I'm on the healing prayer ministry team in the Parish, and at Southampton Celebrate, and at Cor Lumen Christi's Catholic Miracle Rally.

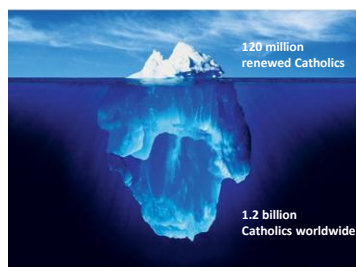
Now I hope that doesn't sound like boasting – or at least, to quote St Paul and the prophet Jeremiah "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord." I am actually amazed that I have been able to do all that – and if you had told me 30 years ago that was all going to happen I would have said absolutely impossible. But actually, as I have discovered, what in our own strength is impossible, with the Holy Spirit is HIM possible!

I emphasise that I am not a priest or a deacon, just an “ordinary” lay person attempting to live out the grace of Baptism. And there at last we have come to one of the central themes of this talk. Living out the grace of our Baptism.

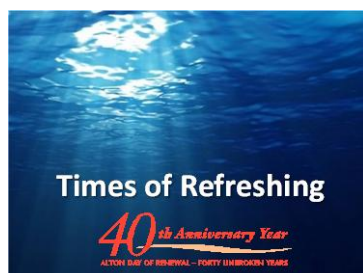


“The ministerial priesthood is one means employed by Jesus for the service of his people, yet our great dignity derives from baptism, which is accessible to all.” (Pope Francis EG 104)

Now I expect there might be a bit of puzzlement among those of you who noticed that the title of this talk is “A time of purification - 40 days of cleansing rain” and are thinking what has this got to do with Baptism? Well, bear with me, all will be revealed. But the main point I want you to take away with you today is this. The grace of Baptism is absolutely amazing: we generally underestimate its power, and think of ourselves as “Ordinary” lay people. But the more we become aware and alive to the “extraordinary” things that God can do in and through us, the more we will see God’s Kingdom come, and His will being done on earth as it is in heaven.



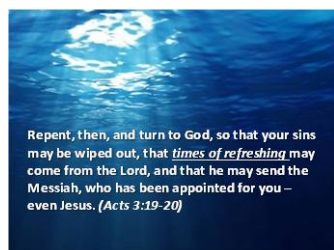
I mentioned earlier that Renewal in the Holy Spirit is now estimated to have touched 120 million Catholics – which is extraordinary in just under 50 years, if you bear in mind how slowly things tend to happen in the Catholic Church. But many people in the renewal have been saying for a while now that we are going to see an even more extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Church and over all the earth. Remember there are 1.2 billion Catholics in the world, so that’s still 90% who have probably not yet been directly affected by the renewal of the Holy Spirit.



Times of Refreshing So, how does this all tie in with the theme of this fortieth year of ADoRE – “Times of Refreshing” and today’s theme? In the Bible, Forty is symbolic for a time of trial, testing, purification, preparation and waiting. But there is one underlying focus: it is a journey which always leads to a spiritual time of growth and change; salvation, renewal and a new beginning.

In the 40 years that Alton Day of Renewal has been faithfully meeting, many hundreds of people have been refreshed and renewed by the teaching, praise, adoration, prayer and fellowship that we offer. We have seen times of both feast and famine in numbers, yet there has never been a period of three months without someone new attending.

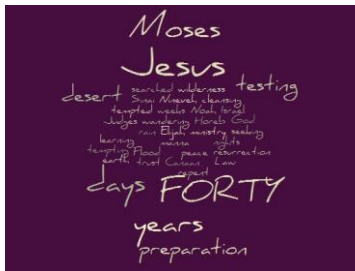
In celebrating our 40 years, we sense that in some way this has been a time of preparation, and the best is yet to come.



Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus. (Acts 3:19-20 NIV)

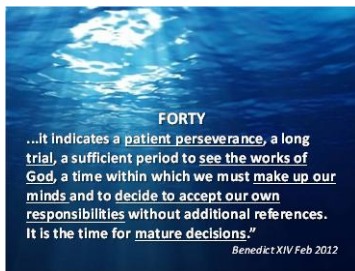
So there’s a clue as to how this time of refreshing can come about: we need to repent, ie make the decision to change our minds, and then turn to God for the purification that will wipe out the sin.

I look forward to hearing how the Holy Spirit will lead our other speakers this year to interpret the signs of the times in the light of this highly symbolic 40 years. I admit I was fascinated when I started looking into it – I guess we all tend to think of the 40 days of Lent as a reflection of Jesus’ 40 days temptation in the wilderness, which in turn was



somehow connected to the Jewish peoples 40 years in the wilderness trying to get to the promised land. But I have discovered a lot more, some of which I will share with you now.

Significance of 40. Apparently there are at least 146 occasions in the Bible when the figure 40 is used – and it's not simply (as I once thought) just a shorthand way of saying "a long time". There is a real significance to the number 40 – it generally symbolizes a period of testing, trial or probation.

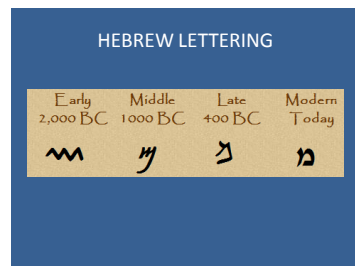


In a teaching called *Journey of Spiritual Renewal in the 40 Days of Lent* written in 2012, **Pope Benedict XVI** wrote the following:

"This number [40] does not represent an exact chronological time, divided by the sum of the days. Rather it indicates a patient perseverance, a long trial, a sufficient period to see the works of God, a time within which we must make up our minds and to decide to accept our own responsibilities without additional references. It is the time for mature decisions." Benedict XIV Feb 2012

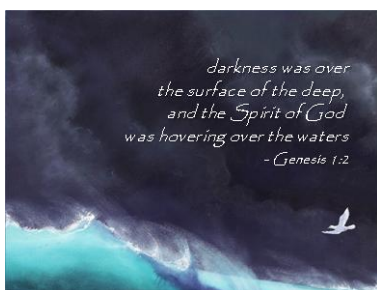


To the Jewish people the number 40 represented transition or change; the concept of renewal; a new beginning. It's surely no coincidence that the time from conception to birth is traditionally 40 weeks.



I also discovered that each letter in the Hebrew alphabet is assigned a number. The letter with the value 40 is **Mem**. The original pictograph for Mem was like a wave of water.

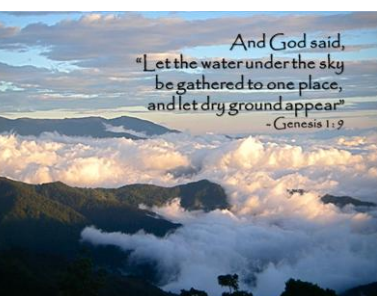
In Jewish mysticism, Mem is the letter of water, symbolising the spring of God's teaching in the Holy Scripture. Just as the waters of an underground spring rise upward from an unknown source to reveal themselves, so does the spring of wisdom rise up from the mysterious source that is God.



Purification by water. When do you think Baptism originated? With John the Baptist? Or WAS IT ONE OF THE LAWS Moses gave the chosen people in the Old Testament? It's amazing but it actually goes back right to the beginning of creation!

So let's go back to the very beginning of Holy Scripture: the first 2 verses of the Bible: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

And then in vv 9-10



And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

In the beginning, the creation in its disordered state was immersed in water and it was through the operation of the Spirit brooding upon the waters that He brought forth order out of chaos, and created new life.

When God gathered the waters together into seas, He caused the earth to be resurrected out of its watery grave which in effect, was the 'womb' from which it came forth. The word used for 'gathered waters' in verse 10 is "mikveh". The mikveh waters were actually the womb of creation from which He brought forth new life out of its former state of 'death'.



In orthodox Judaism the mikveh is the full-immersion bath used for ritual cleansing. A convert to Judaism is required to immerse in a mikveh as part of their conversion, and a woman is required to immerse in a mikveh after her childbirth. This incidentally is what is celebrated on February 2nd the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Forty days after the birth of Christ.



Water is always used as a cleansing, purifying agent in God's purposes to initiate a change from one state of existence to another. At the creation, it was the element of water - used in conjunction with the Spirit's power upon the waters, initiated by the Word of God - that caused God's will to be done. This is the prototype of all ritual immersions, and of course the origin of our Christian baptism.

Pause to consider the wonder of Water: (soft/hard) paradoxically life-taking (the unrighteous drowned) and also life-giving (purification, thirst quenching, irrigation.)

Creation was again cleansed and purified by water with the flood of Noah's day.



Genesis 6 *The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. ⁶ The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. ⁷ So the LORD said, "I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground—for I regret that I have made them." ⁸ But Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD.*



Genesis 7: The LORD then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. ² Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, ³ and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. ⁴ Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made."

⁵ And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him.....



¹¹ In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. ¹² And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.....

[Noah and his family and the animals were shut in the ark]



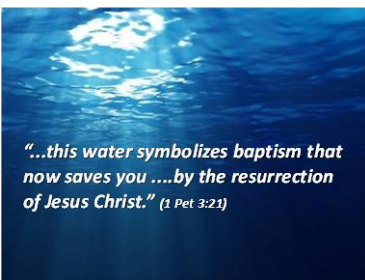
¹⁷ For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. ¹⁸ The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water..... ²³ Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

²⁴ The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days.



[And eventually, after the time of purification and testing, Noah and his family and the animals were saved and came out of the ark to a new beginning for mankind.]

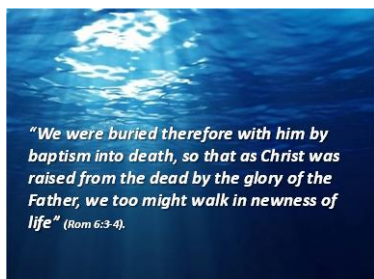
Since the very early days of the church, a parallel has been drawn between the account of the Flood and Noah's Ark, and the sacrament of Baptism. The ark is seen as a prototype of the Church; the wood of the Ark is linked with the wood of the Cross, Both the ark and the cross promise salvation from the purifying waters of the flood, destroying the iniquity of the world.



"...this water symbolizes baptism that now saves youby the resurrection of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet 3:21)

This is explained in 1 peter 3: ¹⁸For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. ¹⁹After being made alive,^d he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— ²⁰to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, ²¹and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God.^e It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

So we are baptised into the fullness of Christ – his death and resurrection. As St Paul says:



"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:3-4).

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:3-4).

Let's take a quick look at the account of the Baptism of Jesus, as we heard in the Gospel a couple of weeks ago:

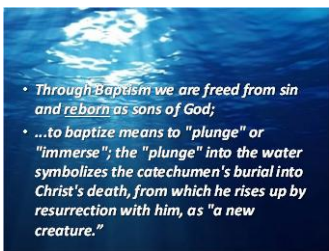
⁴ And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the River Jordan. ⁶ John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt round his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And this was his message: 'After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'



⁹ At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.' (Mark 1:4-11)

Notice the parallels with some of the things we were looking at earlier – Jesus coming up out of the purifying water, as one coming up out of death to new life. And the Holy Spirit is there, just as he was at creation, hovering over the waters.

Notice that John the Baptist makes it clear that Jesus will do more than just repeat a ritual cleansing and baptism for forgiveness – he will baptise with the Holy Spirit.



• Through Baptism we are freed from sin and *reborn* as sons of God;
• ...to baptize means to "plunge" or "immerse"; the "plunge" into the water symbolizes the catechumen's burial into Christ's death, from which he rises up by resurrection with him, as "a new creature."

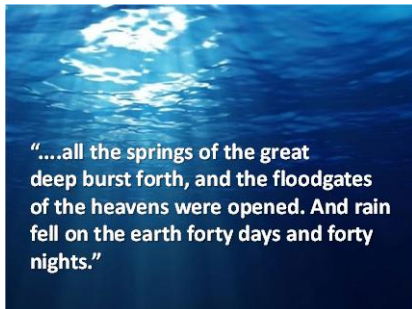
As the Catechism says: CCC **1213** *Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word."* **1214** ...to baptize (Greek baptizein) means to "plunge" or "immerse"; the "plunge" into the water symbolizes the catechumen's burial into Christ's death, from which he rises up by

resurrection with him, as "a new creature."

And again in **1216**Baptism is God's most beautiful and magnificent gift. . . .We call it gift, grace, anointing,



enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal, and most precious gift. It is called gift because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own; grace since it is given even to the guilty; Baptism because sin is buried in the water; anointing for it is priestly and royal as are those who are anointed; enlightenment because it radiates light; clothing since it veils our shame; bath because it washes; and seal as it is our guard and the sign of God's Lordship. (St Gregory of Nazianzen)



I just want to go back to the part of the Genesis account where it says all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. ¹² And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.

It appears that the bursting forth of the waters from the springs of the "great deep" refers to the splitting open of springs of subterranean waters. It brings to my mind [Revelation 7:17](#)

*"For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to **springs of living water.**' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"*

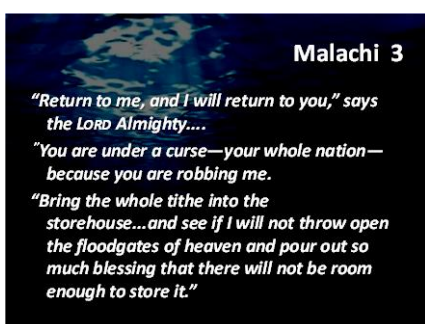


And also John 7: ³⁷ *On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."* ^{[c]39} *By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*



The expression "floodgates (or windows) of heaven" is used twice in reference to the flood (Genesis [7:11](#), [8:2](#)). It is used only three times elsewhere in the Old Testament: twice in 2 Kings [7:2](#) and [19](#), referring to God's miraculous intervention in sending rain, and once in [Malachi 3:10](#), where the phrase is used again of God intervening to pour out abundant blessings on his people. Clearly, in Genesis the expression suggests the extraordinary nature of the

Let's take a look at **Malachi 3** – Through the prophet Malachi, God says to His people:



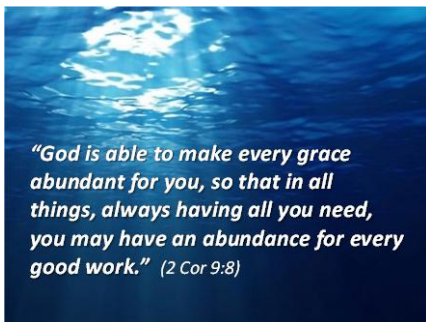
⁷ *Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,"*

He tells them they are under a curse because they are robbing God – by not living up to the law which said they had to give a tenth of everything to God.

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

God's promise in the Old Testament is that if people return to God and are faithful in their tithe offerings, He will pour out a flood of unimaginable blessings. Remember: tithing was an Old Testament obligation. The old covenant was replaced by the New Covenant in Christ. The Catholic church teaches that Christians are dispensed from the obligation of tithing ten percent of their incomes, but not from the obligation to help the Church.

The key to understanding how God wants us to give to the Church is found in 1 Corinthians 16:2, *"On the first day of the week [Sunday] each of you should set aside whatever he can afford,"* and in 2 Corinthians 9:5-8

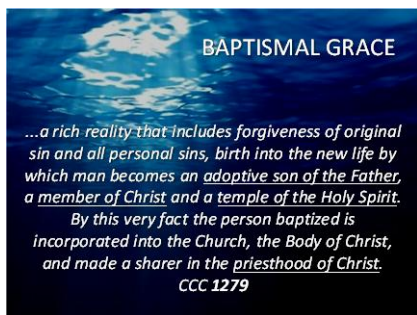


"Consider this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each must do as already determined without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. Moreover, God is able to make every grace abundant for you, so that in all things, always having all you need, you may have an abundance for every good work."

To paraphrase: God doesn't demand a fixed amount of money from us; he wants us to give from the heart. (And not just money but our time, our talents, our whole selves).

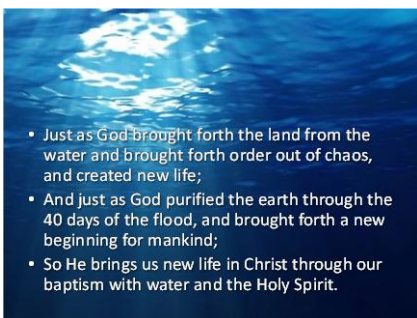
But in return, He promises an absolutely astounding flood of grace and abundance of blessing, to enable us to do His work

I haven't time to talk about all the blessings that God can pour out on us if we consciously live out our baptism, and sacrificially offer ourselves to Him from the heart. But these are summed up in the following paragraph from the Catechism:



CCC 1279 The fruit of Baptism, or baptismal grace, is a rich reality that includes forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins, birth into the new life by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. By this very fact the person baptized is incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, and made a sharer in the priesthood of Christ.

Conclusion So, what I have tried to draw your attention to, in a rather rambling way, is the amazing and extraordinary origins and meaning of our Baptism:



- Just as God brought forth the land from the water and brought forth order out of chaos, and created new life;
- And just as God purified the earth through the 40 days of the flood, and brought forth a new beginning for mankind;
- So He brings us new life in Christ through our baptism with water and the Holy Spirit.



- The more we give ourselves to Jesus, the more He can purify us, perfect us, make us holy, transform us into his likeness by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- God longs to open the floodgates of heaven to pour out abundant blessings and gifts upon us, so that we can all be a "Kingdom of priests to serve our God," bringing His Good News to the world.

So, here is something for you to ponder upon over the 40 days of Lent, starting in a couple of weeks: are you going to make a commitment to ask the Holy Spirit to immerse you fully in the purifying revitalising waters of your baptism, so that you can more fully participate in this new life in Jesus Christ; realise you are a son or daughter of God; that you are a temple of the Holy Spirit; and a sharer in the priesthood of Christ?

LET US PRAY

Sources:

[Pope Benedict on Lent](#)

[Evangelii Gaudium](#)

[Catechism](#)

[Catholic tithing](#)

http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Grammar/Unit_One/Aleph-Bet/Mem/mem.html

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