

Sermon for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity | 2026
By Fr. Hayden A. Butler

The Lessons for this morning present us with three kinds of conversion that mutually reveal and inform one another, and together shape what it means to live as Christians. The most fundamental is the conversion from death to life, the conversion revealed by our Baptism. As St. Paul writes in the Epistle: “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” On Good Friday, the death of Christ absorbs and defeats the finality of death, liberating us from its dominion. In Baptism, we are united to Christ, and through Him, we are restored to communion with the Father. That communion is always what the Scriptures mean by life. We remember that Adam and Eve died on the very day they ate of the tree—not because their bodies immediately failed, but because their fellowship with God was broken. Their physical death merely unfolded the deeper death that had already occurred. In communion with God, we live; apart from Him, we are dead, however vigorous we may appear.

Our union with Christ in His death is also our union with Him in His Resurrection. We receive a life freed from death's tyranny and ordered toward knowing and loving God, taking our place within His redeemed creation. Baptism interrupts what would otherwise be the inevitable story of our lives—a birth that winds inexorably toward death—and gives us a new beginning that, if we do not sever ourselves from it, will mature into resurrection in the Kingdom of God. Until then, the Christian life is cruciform. We are continually putting to death our attachments to the world and its enticements, the flesh and its disordered desires, and the devil with his promises of power and importance. We are always descending into the tomb with Christ, yet always emerging with Him into the life of the Kingdom. We are putting on His glory and learning to greet one another with that peace which surpasses understanding.

This passage from death to life is expressed in a second conversion: from lawlessness to righteousness. When our Lord tells His disciples that their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, He speaks of the glorious freedom to which Christians are called. Yet we should not make the common mistake of dismissing their righteousness altogether. Christ never gives us permission to evade obedience before surpassing it. The Christian life remains a life of obedience, of learning to live within the order God has given His creatures. Like Adam and Eve, we are continually confronted with the question of whether we will trust the command of God. As our Lord said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” The Law was a tutor, preserving God's covenant people from destruction until Christ should come. It restrained sin, ordered the community, and directed Israel toward God. But it could only manage the symptoms of humanity's disease. Christ reveals and imparts the righteousness of God itself, restoring right relationships between God and man, and consequently between neighbor and neighbor. The

righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, at its best, restrained disorder. The righteousness of Christ heals from the deepest place and provides freedom for that righteousness.

The Lessons make clear, however, that life and death, righteousness and sin, are not abstractions. They are experienced as either communion or estrangement. The primary place where we experience them is within the fellowship of the Church. Here, the conversions from death to life and from sin to righteousness become a conversion from enmity to love. Our Lord binds the integrity of our worship to the integrity of our relationships: "Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." St. John speaks just as plainly: "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren." Again, he writes, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar." Most of our participation in life or death comes through the quiet, almost imperceptible movements we make toward or away from one another. We often wish to leap directly from conflict to reconciliation, but shortcuts usually produce only a counterfeit communion, one that lacks the power to transform us. God ordinarily leads us by a slower road. Often reconciliation begins simply by allowing the person we have reduced to an enemy to become a stranger again—someone we no longer presume to know completely, someone capable once more of surprising us and evoking our hospitality. Only then may a stranger become a friend, and a friend again become a brother. This is the direction toward which grace is always tending. The journey may take years, but Christians possess that kind of time. The length of the road is never a sufficient reason to abandon it.

The Gospel makes clear that this movement toward one another is not separate from our movement toward God but inseparably woven into it. What appears to be a small contempt for a fellow Christian may, beneath the surface, be sin gaining mastery and death reclaiming its territory. We cannot seek conversion at one level while refusing it at the others. We must seek eternal life through righteousness expressed in reconciliation, or not at all. To do otherwise is to divide what God has joined together. Dorothy Day once observed, "I only love God as much as I love the person I love the least." So this morning, during the Offertory, call to mind the person toward whom your heart still harbors resentment, and deliberately offer that relationship to God for reconciliation, healing, and new life. Perhaps begin with nothing more than this prayer: "Lord, I forgive; help my unforgiveness."

The communion we seek with Christ in the Eucharist this morning is both the source and the measure of our embrace of the baptismal, cruciform life. We cannot embrace its rewards and joys without embracing the total conversion of ourselves, soul and body, that it requires. Yet, in Christ, there are greater things ahead than any we leave behind. For as St. Paul reminds us, "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection."