

- In 1865 the incomparable St. John Henry Newman wrote the great hymn: *Praise to the Holiest in the Height*. This hymn is actually part of his epic poem: *The Dream of Gerontius*, which describes a soul's journey from death and judgment into Purgatory.
- Newman's hymn, which is the praise the dying man gives to God begins: *Praise to the Holiest in the height, and in the depth be praise: in all his words most wonderful, most sure in all his ways*.
- It continues with an explanation of salvation history: *O loving wisdom of our God! When all was sin and shame, a second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came.*
- *O wisest love! that flesh and blood, which did in Adam fail, should strive afresh against the foe, should strive and should prevail;*
- *And that a higher gift than grace should flesh and blood refine, God's presence and his very self, and essence all-divine.*
- *O generous love! that he, who smote in Man for man the foe, the double agony in Man for man should undergo; And in the garden secretly, and on the cross on high, should teach his brethren, and inspire to suffer and to die.*
- *Praise to the Holiest in the height, and in the depth be praise: in all his words most wonderful, most sure in all his ways.*
- You'll notice that Newman refers to Christ as a "second Adam," which is not at all uncommon, as many of the Fathers of the Church referred to Jesus Christ as the "New Adam," and is a point made by St. Paul in his 1st Letter to the Corinthians. St. Paul writes:
- *So, too, it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being," the last Adam a life-giving spirit. But the spiritual was not first; rather the natural and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, earthly; the second man, from heaven. As was the earthly one, so also are the earthly, and as is the heavenly one, so also are the heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one.*
- The key line here is the last one: "Just as we have borne the image of the earthly [Adam], we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one."
- Simply by dint of being born, by being human, each of us bears the likeness of our first parents, Adam and Eve. We share their human likeness physically – being made of the same dust as they were.
- But as Newman puts it, our flesh and blood have failed in Adam, making all *sin and shame*. Worse yet, we have inherited from our first parents the condition of concupiscence, giving rise to this disordered inclination toward sin within each of us.
- And so, like Adam and Eve, we too are sinners. We, too, have rebelled against God and His commandments, and have forfeited paradise by our sins.
- Yet, this is not God wills for his beloved creation. And this is why a *second Adam* came to the fight to strive against the ancient foe and rescue us.
- But Christ didn't simply come to save us from our sins. While it is the ultimate reason He became man, suffered, died, and rose again, Christ wants more for us than just salvation. He wants our holiness! Jesus wants us to be like Him, to bear His image!
- This is why Newman writes: *O generous love! that he, who smote in Man for man the foe, the double agony in Man for man should undergo; And in the garden secretly, and on the cross on high, should teach his brethren, and inspire to suffer and to die.*

- Yes, Christ died for us: He smote in Man for man the foe and underwent His double agony for us.
- But in His sufferings in the Garden and on the cross, Jesus taught and inspired us to be willing to suffer and die to self, so that we might imitate Him and come to bear His likeness through holiness.
- Truly, my dear brothers and sisters, bearing the image of Jesus Christ is both our great privilege and our great hope as Christians. It is what matters most in this life: that we be like Christ in every way, that we resemble Him, so that we might be Christians in full integrity.
- And it all begins with the great sacrament that we celebrate today: Holy Baptism. Our baptism is the inauguration of our relationship with Christ, opening to us a life of sanctifying grace, which is the grace that saves us.
- It is through this sacrament that God first forgives our sins, both the original sin we inherited from Adam and Eve, as well as any personal sins we have committed.
- And the virtues of faith, hope, and charity are planted within us like seeds that can flower within us, enabling us to be true Christians – for we cannot hope to be Christians without practicing these three virtues.
- A man without *faith* cannot believe in the Lord as a Christian must. A man without *hope* cannot set his sights on Heaven as his final beatitude as a Christian must. A man without *love* cannot fulfill the two greatest commands the Lord Himself gave us as a Christian must.
- Thus, being baptized changes us, it marks our souls and opens for us the life of grace so that we can resemble Christ more fully.
- As St. Paul wrote to St. Titus in our second reading today, God’s grace is given to us so that we might “reject godless ways and worldly desires, and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age.”
- Through the “bath of rebirth,” we have been cleansed and saved, so that we might be God’s own people, “eager to do what is good.”
- And we are called to be like Christ not simply for our own salvation, but that we might be “a light for the nations,” that we might “open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.”
- Indeed, holiness is never a gift solely for the one who is holy. Holiness is meant to be shared. By living holy lives ourselves, we encourage others to a life of holiness.
- So, my dear brothers and sisters, as we delve into this new year with all sorts of resolutions, let us make the resolution to resemble Christ more clearly – like the saints!
- In our baptism we were given the gift of sanctifying grace, the forgiveness of sins, and the virtues of faith, hope, and charity. We were made members of the Body of Christ, and so we are His co-heirs: sons and daughters of God the Father with Jesus!
- Calling upon the graces of our baptism that are strengthened and renewed through our worthy reception of the sacraments, may we live our baptismal promise of obedience to the Lord well so that we truly may take on Christ’s likeness.
- And in so doing, may our lives give praise to the Holiest in the heights.
- St. John Henry Newman, pray for us.