

A New Life

Romans 6:12–23



Many of you might have had a chance to change professions or employers simply because you have realized that the salary was not a good one or the employer was not a kind one. You have aspired to have a good salary and certainly and work for a good employer, a good master, so you changed jobs or profession. But one these conditions are fulfilled, you try to serve the new boss so well that the former boss will take note and miss what he lost. Good master and good salary are stimuli for good services and commitment.

Unless you changed cities, you may notice that although you thought that by changing jobs, you wouldn't see or hear about your old boss again. But depending on the kind of employment or the circles you are in, sometimes you reunite again or at least cross paths again. Although that has happened, it is true that you don't serve the old boss again. The relationship is not totally forgotten, but it is broken, you are free from that commitment of service.

Such a shift of bosses, of masters is the main characteristic of the Christian life, as you see Jesus has come to free you from sin, your old master, and becomes your new master to serve him with a totally new life!

Yes, we still remain sinful, sin still pays a visit more often than we desire, but because of our baptisms Christ makes us righteous in God's sight.

Sinful because the flesh wages war against the spiritual and righteous due to the righteousness that Christ grants and gives to all those who will go after him into the waters of Baptism.

The Epistle reading teaches us that prior to our Baptisms, we sinner served a master, obeying him and yielding the members of their bodies to be instruments to his evil enterprise, that master is sin. St. Paul says in our text, "You . . . were once slaves of sin. . . . When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness" (vv 17, 20).

Now how can we describe that life under the master of sin? One way to describe it, is to say that in the former life we were inclined to all sorts of evil without the slightest feeling of shame. From edge to edge, we were corrupted in thoughts, sayings, and deeds.

In that kind of life we didn't give God the true honor that should be his from loving, fearing, and trusting creatures who hold God in the highest esteem. We gave our mouths over to the magic incantations and to the practice of superstition. O, no we didn't! Somebody might say. We live in a developed society that no, we don't believe in incantations and superstitions. Actually might not think that we do, but practice says otherwise. Haven't you gone by the horoscope? Don't you sometimes say what sign you are? So you did believe in superstitions!

We were not ashamed to summon ancestors to be gods and helpers. No we didn't! You might say again. But again, haven't we heard what people say when

somebody has died, so, and so, de deceased, “is watching over us!” Right there we trust our ancestors to help us.

So we used the precious gift of tongue and voice to praise and pray to those to whom it does not belong. We wasted our ears listening to the lies of seers and diviners instead of taking heed to listen to God’s holy revelation. Nor was our life in accordance with his Word.

Our hearts did not honor and respect those worthy of our regard and consideration but did more to despise them. With tongues of vipers, we injected venomous words; we killed, although we did not kill physically. We fell short of the true love and respect for those in wedlock and, dancing even more quickly than the music itself, we indulged in sexual immorality. Trotting with our feet, extending our hands, and projecting with our minds, we stole anything from eggs to pearls. Never did we consider the reputation of our neighbors to be a gift from God that needs to be protected. We could never figure out that coveting was a real sign of disdain and displeasure for the blessings God has given us.

All these things we did, helped by our bodies, and they yielded but a sour fruit: “But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed?” Paul asks. “The end of those things,” he says, “is death” (v 21). Death! Death it is!

But how do we know this? We know this thanks to the Law, God’s law. However the Law was our master then. But now we are not anymore under the Law; we are under the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave his life on the cross and carried us through the waters of Baptism to the newness of life. “But now . . . you have been set free from sin,” Paul says. “You are not under law but under grace” (vv 22, 14). We died with Christ in the waters of Baptism, and we were raised with him.

Again we refer to baptism as the elemental part of our new birth in Christ who also allowed himself to be baptized, not for his new birth, but as he said, to fulfill all righteousness. With that he exchanged his righteousness for ours and became sin for us. As if this were not enough, he continued this journey to the cross, where he pleaded forgiveness for the sinner and paid the price of our sin, and of our death. He did everything to restore you to a new and better relationship with God. His death and resurrection has given you a new standing before God. You have not only life but also peace and hope.

That act of freeing us from our old master produces some changes as well. We are changed from our lack of true fear of God to that of true love for your neighbors. We love and fear God because of what Christ did for us, he has worked both actively and obediently to accomplish our salvation. He, Jesus, worshiped the only true God while in temptation and called upon only his name for prayer and praise.

And his example of showing mercies and true love for neighbors enables us to do the same. He visited the sick ones and the needy. He fed thousands and comforted the bereaved while raising the dead. He paid for all of this with his most innocent and precious blood, not with gold or silver, so that you are not held responsible for your many failures. And now you belong to him who is your new master, and he is also in you. United to him in Holy Baptism.

And because of your baptism we hear constantly the assurance that our sins are forgiven. In contrition and repentance, through confession and absolution, through the

means of grace we are constantly reminded and assured that our sins are dismissed. And in turn we say amen, thanks be to God, praised and honored be his name. And not just reminded but actually our sins are taken away, truly!!

Now, here is the question that the epistle asks “What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you, . . . having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness” (vv 15–17a, 18).

Since God has provided so many ways for your sins to be forgiven, should you persist in sinning so that there may be all the more grace? Such is a foolish idea! As you died with Christ, this old life was dead and buried. You came out of the baptismal waters to begin a new life. As you were freed, you now live in the light of that new freedom. You have a new master to serve, a master who has called you to be holy as the Lord your God, the triune God, is holy.

But aren't we under grace now and not the law, how come that we hear the law, and how come we do get offended at times when we hear the law?

We are under God's grace for sure, in fact we are in a new life, and this new life consists of this, that God fills the totality of your life, making it a consecrated life. Through faith, he moves your hands to do his will, your feet to walk his ways. In this new life, your voice also and always will be singing for God—the only true king, and your lips are filled with the message from him—that sings of your redemption in his Son. Under him, even your intellect is driven to love him with all your heart and mind. So it is that the will once bound captive in death now is viewed as a gift from the author of life.

Now this is good news, and it is the goal of a Christian life. However, we are still in the flesh, we are still on this side of eternity and the flesh is prone to sin, to go back again to the old master. That's where the law comes in, to remind us that we have a New Master now. That's the work of the law.

That's what the epistle reading teaches us. That we once served our mortal bodies and the desires driven by Satan and self-centeredness, our old masters. Now we have been brought to the newness of life as we died with Christ in our Baptism. Therefore, Paul says, “present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness” (v 13). Let Christ shine through you, bringing forth fruits worthy of him. Avail your bodies to serve God, bringing the Good News of salvation to others. God is present in your neighbor. Christ has made you a member of his body—the Church—to do works not of the flesh but of the Spirit, driven by the Gospel. He shows you love, mercy, and compassion. As the apostles once said, “We cannot but speak of [the things of Christ] we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

By faith, the child of God knows that he is not the cause or the source of good deeds, but it is Christ who is living in him who has carried out God's holy will. So God's child will also realize that the wages paid by the former and new master do not bear any point of comparison. One is a deserved sentence of death, but the other is the unmerited free gift of everlasting life.

May the Lord who called you to newness of life in Holy Baptism lead you by the power of the Holy Spirit to serve your new master, bringing others the Good News of salvation as he places the unbelieving neighbor in your path. Amen.