

Taking our lead from Christ's Baptism, it seems only appropriate for us to consider our own. And to do that, I want us to connect our Baptisms with what I imagine was one of the top 10 New Year's resolutions for most every American. About this time every year, we are flooded with images and ads aimed at helping us achieve a universal resolution: to make ourselves pretty. And while these various products and programs seem innocent enough—exercise equipment, cosmetics, dietary supplements, and weight loss plans—there is really nothing innocent about them. For the message they are peddling is: *only beautiful people enjoy life*. How much time we spend on our looks and our outward appearances suggest we are all influenced by this misguided belief. We are programmed from a very young age by the media, by peer pressure, and by our own family members to look a certain way, to act a certain way, to conform to the image of what is considered beautiful and acceptable in our culture. This is not just a problem for teenagers and young adults, people of all ages struggle with body dysmorphia. We're never good enough for ourselves. But how could we be! Look at our society. Scroll through social media, flip through a popular magazine, pick up a bestselling novel, and you will find the message writ large: only beautiful people enjoy life. But this quest for beauty comes at a high price; not only in the money we spend, but also in the negative effect it has on our self-esteem and self-worth. If we are overweight or underweight, if our teeth aren't sparkly white or perfectly straight, if our skin is not clear of all blemishes or if our clothes aren't of the modern style and trend, then we are made to feel less of a person. After all, only people who are free of such "trouble spots" can really enjoy life. How many hours of our lives are wasted on thinking about such things? Such vanity consumes us! We can deny our obsession, we can down play or excuse our insecurities, but in the end, we are all guilty of it to one degree or another. We must take responsibility for the excessive value we place on physical beauty. We must confess it, own it, and then seek a new and better definition of beauty. Ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, the body has been something to be ashamed of, something to be hidden. Sin brought distortion, confusion and conflict inside and outside the body. Adam and Eve were forced to cover themselves because they perceived they were naked; that is, the body itself had become an object to be adored, worshiped, lusted after, and envied.

What makes a beautiful person? What makes for a beautiful life? Contrary to popular opinion, beauty is not in the eye of the beholder. Beauty is not a subjective quality best left to each individual to decide for

him/herself. Instead, beauty has as an objective standard. Only recently has then understanding been lost to us. Interesting to note that in the ancient Greek language, the word for “beautiful” and the word for “good” are the same. To pursue goodness, then, is to be beautiful; to be beautiful is to embody goodness. God Himself is beauty because God Himself is the highest good. The goodness of God is the supreme form of beauty. The more we reflect God, then, the more beautiful we become. What makes a beautiful person? A beautiful person is not one who has perfect skin or hair or body. But rather, as St. Peter says, beauty is a condition of the heart. “The incorruptible *beauty* is a gentle and quiet spirit”. What counts as a beautiful life? St. Paul tells us that a beautiful life is, “A inner life of peace. For this is good and *beautiful* in the sight of God.” Beauty is an interior quality, which spills over into the physical realm. God is beauty par excellence, and when He spilled over into our physical existence in Christ’s birth, He embodied beauty.

If our beautiful Savior is the *sine qua non* of beauty, how do we become beautiful? Herein lies the strongest argument for Baptism. For in Baptism, God takes a child of the world, a child born into the ugliness of our inherited sin, and makes her beautiful. “Behold I make all things new” says our Lord, and in Baptism He makes good on His promise. Baptism renders us totally transformed in the image of God; we no longer look like ourselves, but resemble our Redeemer, having died to ourselves and recreated in the image of Christ. Beauty is not just about outward appearances. That’s what people don’t get. To them, beauty is skin deep. Well, beauty might be skin deep, but ugliness is to the bone. We see the appearance of things, and then make our judgments, whether positive or negative; but God examines the heart. Now if you are saying to yourself right now, “I so wish I could believe all of this, but I can’t” ...I say, “You can!”. Change your world. For this world is perishing, the outward appearance of things is quickly passing away, but the hope of every Christian is the liberation of the whole creation from its bondage to decay and ugliness, the transfiguration of our bodies to participate in the glory and beauty that is God. We are invited to share in God’s beauty, to reflect God’s beauty in our very lives, and to enjoy God’s beauty each and every day. And we are beautiful to God every time we model one of His attributes or practice one of His virtues or reflect His heart to the world. I end this morning by saying if you were one of the many who made such a New Year’s resolution—good news! You can cross it off your list! It’s only day 9 of the new year, and you’ve already achieved your goal for you are beautiful in Christ. Amen.