**Baptism Cannot be Merely by Desire**

**Saint Gregory Nazianzen** wrote:

**“**But then, you say, is not God merciful, and since He knows our thoughts and searches out our desires, will He not take the desire of Baptism instead of Baptism? You are speaking in riddles, if what you mean is that because of God’s mercy the unenlightened is enlightened in His sight; and he is within the kingdom of heaven who merely desires to attain to it.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Ironically he adds:**

“If you judge the murderously disposed man by his will alone, apart from the act of murder, then you may reckon as baptized him who desired baptism apart from the reception of baptism. But if you cannot do the one how can you do the other? I cannot see it. Or, if you like, we will put it thus If desire in your opinion has equal power with actual baptism, then judge in the same way in regard to glory, and you may be content with longing for it, as if that were itself glory. And what harm is done you by your not attaining the actual glory, as long as you have the desire for it?”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Various conditions are essential for a sound baptism, according to the Holy Scriptures and to the fathers, therefore, baptism by desire or by eagerness is insufficient in the New Testament.

Regarding the patriarchs, prophets, righteous saints of the Old Testament, it is written that they rested in hope of the salvation. If baptism is unity with Christ in the likeness of His death and burial (Rom 6:5 NKJ), He was the one Who was buried with them in His death. The descent of Christ into hades after the cross is parallel with the descent of the righteous of the Old Testament for unity with Christ on the likeness of death and burial.

**Old Testament Believers:-**

Those old righteous fathers are considered buried with Christ especially in their crossing of the eternal sentence to death, since He Himself liberated them by descending into hades. It is written in the Psalm “*For You will not leave my soul in Sheol”* (Psa 16:10 NKJ). Saint Peter wrote, “*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit,* ***by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison****… There is also an* ***antitype which now saves us—baptism, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ****”* (1Pe 3:18-19, 21 NKJ). Our Lord Christ transported their souls out of hades and brought them into paradise as a guarantee for the resurrection on the last day, in other words in hope of the resurrection. Moreover, “*many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many*” (cf. Mat 27:52,53). This has been a visual sign for the mystical union with the resurrected Christ. It was a guarantee for the resurrection in the last day of faithful of the Old Testament together with the saints of the New Testament.

**The Right-Hand Crucified Thief:**

The Thief who was crucified on the right hand of our Lord, died few hours after Christ’s death, but before His resurrection; therefore he had to enter hades, before our Lord took him the same day into paradise, since baptism is not only burial with Christ but also resurrection with Christ. Our Lord went to hades and preached the spirits in prison (cf. 1Pe 3:19), He spent three days in the other world before His resurrection because salvation and similarly baptism is a manifestation of the Holy Trinity. The right hand thief experienced the same path of salvation as the believers of the Old Testament.

1. N.& PN. Fathers, series2, Vol. VII, St. Gregory Nazienzen, Oration XL, *On Holy Baptism*, point XXII p, 367. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., point XXIII, p. 367, 368. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)