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Let us look at the Catechism:

Part V: The Sacraments

How many parts are there in a Sacrament?

Two: then outward visible sign and the inward spiritual grace

What is the outward visible sign in Baptism

Water, in which the person is baptized in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

What is the inward and spiritual grace?

Death to sin, and a new birth to righteousness: though we were born in sin, and were the children of wrath, in Baptism we are made the children of grace.

What must a person have in order to be baptized?

Two things: Repentance, or turning away from sin, and Faith, or truly believing the promises that God makes in that Sacrament.

And those promises are: death to sin, and a new birth to righteousness. Death; and new birth; death and life; life from death.

The death is the death we die to our old self, our selfish self, our self-centered self in repentance: repentance is a death; a dying; and the life, the life we receive, are given, the new birth which we undergo, is the gift of faith.

The two are linked: inseparably; death and life: repentance and faith. Giving up, and getting. Giving up, in order to get, to receive: giving up something which may be very much alive and kicking within

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us, giving it up to death, in order to come alive to something which may be very much on the horizon, just beyond our reach, our grasp, our apprehension.

To what are we dying?

To our hopes and dreams, maybe; to the very things that seem most to quicken us, make us come alive and feel alive: for a moment; a fleeting moment; and then they - like us- crash and burn.

We think of sin, so often, in terms of dirty deeds and dirty thoughts: and so we should. But sins's reach is far greater, and it's grasp extends so deep into the core of our very beings - it is our birthright. It takes all that would connect us, or reconnect us, with our God, our Creator, and short circuits them, embedding them in the world instead; the world, the flesh and the devil; which binds all that is noblest and best, even, in our aspirations, to all that is most fallible and transitory in the world around us. It gives us immediate satisfaction, but robs us of that which gives eternal glory to God.

And in the process, that which makes our pulse race deadens us to the word that that same God is broadcasting, sending our way; that word which is the one thing that could redirect us, and get us out of the endless cycle of diminishing returns into which we invest our lives.

Baptism is all about dying.

Today we celebrate the dying of Aksel Roy Escareño

Not that we are physically going to put him to death, here, in this birdbath - that's the proper designation of this kind of font, by the way: it is called a birdbath, and rather pejoratively. A real baptismal font is one you can drown in.

You can't drown in a birdbath. Even a bird can't drown in a bird bath.

And baptism is about dying.

About living; about life

But first about dying; about dying to the life we are given, when we are brought into this world: and about being brought to life again with a life which cannot die, by the agency of the Spirit of the Living God.

It is about the renunciation of any claim we have upon life. About surrendering - giving up - our grip on all the things to which we naturally gravitate, the things that we think define us, make us who we are and what we are. It means giving that up; all of it. All at once, if we could. If we can.

But we can't

So it means giving it up, piece by piece, little by little, day by day, every day for the rest of our life; it means living a life of dying, a bit at a time, giving way, making way for the Lord of Life, Jesus, to be for us, really and truly, the Lord of our life; our life: that's yours and mine; and Axsel's.

Now there is something in all this that offends us, that gives us offense.



giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;

**And so says Jesus:**

for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word  
and understands it.

**The Word of God, which**

shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

this is the seed; scattered freely, it falls where it may; most of it  
is wasted, apparently: God's generosity is prodigious. What that seed  
needs is soil, and if a seed is a powerhouse of energy, stored up and  
ready to be shaped to some task, given some form, made into  
something for which the seed is also the matrix, the DNA, then the  
earth - the dirt; the soil, is the other matrix, the holder, the support,  
that embrace the seed and contributes its resources; its energy, so  
that the seed, dying in being broken apart from within by the release  
of that surge of life, gives its life - its identity, its being - to a plant  
which will, in turn, perhaps live to produce countless seeds of its own.

The cycle of life, as the Lion King sings.

But the cycle of life is grounded in death: and soil, that  
composite of organic and inorganic matter, of native rock, pounded  
and fragmented by wind sun and rain, and of the remains of other  
organisms, being decomposed by the countless forms of life,  
microorganism, saprophytes, with which the soil teems.

Decomposers; their job to take apart what the seed has put  
together, so that the element may be incorporated into new life.

A heady model.

But it is soil that sustains life; and where it is absent, where the bedrock has been beaten bare, as on the path; or where the soil is thin, we have conditions in which life will not be sustained; where, on the opposite end, the soil is good but has been infested with other predatory organisms - weeds, in this case, thorny ones - the life, too, is quickly snuffed out. The seed, one way or another, does not receive the nutrients it needs to give us life for the new life for which it was designed.

Soil, for Jesus, means us: the hearers of the word. The word is the word is the word; all seeds are the same; but the soils are different.

He who has ears, let him hear.”

as Jesus says - which is the point of the story.

If you have ears, if you have the understanding to take what you hear and let plant it in your life, you will grow; you will have life.

That understanding is the product of our own lives: the sufferings, defeats and failures: the dreams and schemes that have died within us; or die with us.

Things we have cooked up for ourselves; plots we have hatched; scenarios we have mapped out and plotted for our lives. Things we have wanted with all our heart: why? That they might give us life; yes: eternal life; immortality.

How many of us try to outrun death, by what we build: even in our heads.

And how many people do we outrun, or run over, in our scheming?

So when Jesus comes into our lives, and says, give it up: no;

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give up; we are scandalized. I was. When I began to discern the name of this game, that it was all about losing; not winning. When I began to understand that this Jesus, who stood in my way, who was The Way, was saying “No way” to all the things that I was all about doing - even in His Name - when i began to grasp the extent of the claim that He was making on my life, in return for His, I was distraught.

Scandal, is the word. So much to be given up; for what? So that this Life might be received?

Again: He did not ask what I might give Him; what I might do; what I might achieve to make myself worthy of the gift; He asked only for what I might give up: which was: everything.

Br ready to die, he said.

It hasn't happened yet, this death. and yet it happens every day, almost: constantly; this dying; this giving up. What I want; what I want to have so that I might be who i want to be; all of it: rubbish.

Give it up.

Give it up.

There; now: good! receive. Take; take what you are being offered.

Scandalous, really.

That word - skandalon - runs through this reading like a red thread; yet all our best and brightest translations translate it out.

He who has ears, let him hear.”

Skandalon. Scandal; the word is Greek, for heaven's sake; it means just what it means in English: a cause of offense; a snare; s trap to fall on or into; s stone to stumble on.

Every where Jesus goes, that word goes with Him: skandalon; stone of stumbling.

Some day - maybe today, maybe it happened in his mother's womb, Aksel Roy will meet this Jesus, who steps into his way, and opens to him The Way; the Way of Life.

Now, symbolically, he is put to death; brought to the font by others, splashed with water - not dipped or dropped or dragged in, I admit, but that's what is meant; if he remembers any of this - no matter - it might be the otherness of it all. Men in dresses, bawling things over his head, into his face; water trickling down his skull, into his eyes.

Scandalous, really - infant baptism; and a scandal to so many of our brothers and sisters in Christ that we do it.

That we do it and don't know why; what happens; what is going on.

We don't; God does: that's the point.

We offer Aksel Escareño here in faith; in good faith: that he will grow up to know the Lord, that he will not be able to remember a time when he did not hear Our Lord's Voice, His Word, in his ear. We pray for that; and that 'hearing - he will understand.

And that some day, some day, that same Lord will cross his path, and let the shadow and the scandal of the Cross, fall upon him, and say: now; Aksel; you are Mine.

Reedy? Ready or not; now - now - you are Mine; your life is not your own; you were bought at a price; the price has been paid; the gift is yours; now take it.

The candidate for Holy Baptism will please step forward.

**down to nave**