

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Gospel: Mark 1:7-11

John (the Baptist) proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

REFLECTION 1: THE FOUNTAIN OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

There are several reasons why it was fitting for John to baptise Jesus at the beginning of His public ministry. Jesus was about to embark on His great work, and it was appropriate that He be recognised publicly by His forerunner. John was the "voice crying in the wilderness" prophesied by Isaiah, calling people to repentance in preparation for their Messiah. By baptizing Jesus, John was declaring to all that here was the One they had been waiting for, the Son of God.

The occasion of Jesus' public baptism recorded for all generations to come the perfect embodiment of the Trinity revealed in glory from heaven. The testimony directly from heaven of the Father's pleasure with the Son and the descending of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus (Mark 1: 10-11) is a beautiful picture of the Trinitarian nature of God. Jesus was on the Jordan River being baptised; the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and alighted on him, and the voice of the Father was heard, all happening at the same time. It also depicts the work of the Father, Son and Spirit in the salvation of those Jesus came to save. All the glorious truth of the mercy of God through Jesus Christ is on display at His baptism. Jesus' baptism paved the way for his ministry. In baptism he was approved by the Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit. This empowered him to carry out his mission - to save the world from sin, be the only way to the Father, and offer the gift of a full life in this world and eternal life in heaven.

During his general audience on November 13th 2013, Pope Francis devoted his reflections to the sacrament of Baptism, stating that it opens the door to a journey of faith, and helps to sustain us along the way. Baptism, he said, "illuminates us with the grace of Christ, so that we may also be light for others". He went on to say, that it is in this sacrament that "God's mercy intervenes in a powerful way to save us and forgive our sins, opening to us the doors to a new life." Pope Francis concluded his reflections by challenging those present, asking them "...are we conscious that Baptism is the fountain of our relationship with God? Is it a live reality for us? ... Do we often reflect about this gift that we have received, this profound union with Jesus who gave His life for me?" Today, as we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, is a good time to begin this reflection.

REFLECTION 2: REVISTING OUR BAPTISM

Most of us who were baptised as infants cannot remember the moment of our baptism. Fortunately, we have an abundance of symbols and rituals to anchor us in our 'baptismal memory'. When we pass by the baptismal font in our Church we can 'remember' our baptism. Anytime we have the pleasure of being in the congregation at a baptism ceremony we can 'remember' our baptism. We can look at photographs or take out the family christening gown or baptismal candle to have a visual reminder of our initiation into the Christian faith. But most significantly whenever we turn to one of the Gospel

passages that tell the story of Jesus' baptism we can 'remember' our baptism in an especially powerful way.

Jesus comes to the Jordan, is baptised by John and everything changes. The sky breaks open. The spirit comes, announcing the fulfilment of the prophetic promise for which the people of Israel were waiting. And when we are baptised the same thing happens – the spirit comes down and makes itself known, claiming us as children of God and calling us to anchor ourselves in God's love.

The fact of our baptism ought to have continuing significance and impact upon our lives. It ought to be a continual source of strength and comfort. Baptism isn't just a one-off event but an ongoing reality. We have a new identity in Christ. Every day we are to live out the meaning of our baptism. To say 'I belong to God' is to find new strength to meet the difficult situations life presents us with. To remember our baptism is to gain a new sense of personal responsibility for our lives - we are accountable to God for the life we live.

The simple act of entering a Catholic Church and blessing ourselves with water from the font at the entrance is a way of remembering our baptismal commitment - in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. We remember who we are as we enter God's presence. And it makes even more sense to put water on our foreheads as we leave the Church and go out into the world – for there the battles are fought. This is a month in which many of us are feeling overwhelmed. In January, the holidays are over and the bills are looming. Some people are dealing with a variety of post-holiday emotions; others already feel that they have failed in their new year's resolutions. The message of Jesus' baptism and a reminder of our own is needed at a time such as this:

“Lord we are yours, help us to know it,
To know it in the depth of our hearts and to act accordingly,
Through Christ our Lord. Amen’.