

Homily – Baptism of the Lord – (Year C) – January 13, 2019

IS 42:1-4, 6-7; PS 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10; ACTS 10:34-38; 3:4-7; LK 3:15-16, 21-22

There's a great quote from an ancient homily by **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** for the **Feast of the Baptism of the Lord**. The saint said:

Jesus rises from the waters; the world rises with him. The heavens like Paradise with its flaming sword, closed by Adam for himself and his descendants, are rent open. The Spirit comes to him as to an equal, bearing witness to his Godhead. A voice bears witness to him from heaven, his place of origin. The Spirit descends in bodily form like the dove that so long ago announced the ending of the flood and so gives honour to the body that is one with God.

<http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/loh/christmas/baptism/officeofreadings.htm>

Thanks to the Lord's goodness to us, everything that happened to Jesus at his Baptism happens for us as well—though not in **precisely the same manner**. St. Paul gives us some insight into what Baptism means for us. As he wrote to the **Corinthians**:

For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body... (1 Cor 12:13)

And to the **Galatians**, St. Paul wrote:

For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ. (Gal 3:27)

We'll come back to this particular quote from **Galatians** again, because it is key to our **Scripture reflection** today, and particularly, for our consideration of an appropriate **response** to the Lord for his gift of **Baptism**.

In the Gospel passage for **today's Mass**—taken from **St. Luke's Gospel**—we heard:

After...Jesus...had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." (Lk 3:21-22)

Before considering our appropriate responses to the Lord for his goodness to us *in submitting to a Baptism he did not need*—after all, he was without sin—let's take a closer look at the **parallels** between **Jesus' Baptism...and ours**.

In Sacramental Baptism, after the water is **poured** over us **three times**—or, in the case of **immersion baptism**, after we have been **plunged** into the water three times—accompanied by an **invocation** of the **Three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity**:

- Heaven is re-opened **to us** because the death sentence that prevented our entry—namely, **Original Sin**—has been *repealed*.
- The **Holy Spirit descends** from heaven and **takes residence in our souls**—making us **Temples of the Holy Spirit**.
- And though we may not hear it with our human ears, God the Father does **indeed** say to each baptized person: **“You are my beloved son...you are my beloved daughter...in whom I am well pleased.”**

When I was growing up, my Mom always insisted that I write a **thank-you note** to anyone who gave me a gift. To that early training, I’ve added a personal commitment not to **use** any gift I’ve been given—whether a physical gift, a gift card or money—**until I have written the thank-you note**.

But we can’t exactly write a **“thank-you” note to God** for his gifts to us, can we? Yet, we must all wrestle with the question posed by **Psalm 116**:

How can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me? (Ps 116:12)

Before returning to the quote mentioned earlier from **St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians**, let’s reflect on a couple of things about Jesus’ baptism.

Why did Jesus submit to a baptism he didn’t need?

This is the same question **implicit** in the conversation between **John the Baptist** and **Jesus** when Jesus showed up at the **Jordan River** to be baptized by John. We read in **Matthew’s Gospel**:

...Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.” (Mt 3:13-15)

So why, **then**, did Jesus submit to a Baptism he didn't need?

- For starters, to **sanctify**—to *make holy*—the **waters of Baptism** for *us*.
- Secondly, to **humbly align himself with us sinners** in a **public** way.

God the Son—Jesus Christ—made a **visible statement**, out of **humble obedience** and **love for his Father**...and for **us**—by submitting to a baptism he didn't need.

Now, let's return to **St. Paul's** words to the **Galatians**:

For as many of you as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ. (Gal 3:27)

When the Son of God became human in the person of Jesus, he *put on what we are*.

In **Baptism**, we *put on what he is*—Sacramentally speaking.

And here is where we consider one very **visible** and **intentional** way to **demonstrate** our **gratitude** to Jesus—*publicly*—for his goodness to us.

By dressing in our best clothes for Mass.

In **Psalm 29**—one of the Psalm options for today's Feast—we read:

...adore the LORD in holy attire. (Ps 29:2)

Considering that **the Lord gives the best of himself** to us, does not such an act of love **call forth from us** our most **profound public response** of *gratitude* and *respect*?

You can always tell what kinds of activities are most important to people by the way they dress.

People will shell out big money for a **wedding dress**, a **new suit** for work, a **new outfit** for graduation. What does it mean, then, when we dress no better for Mass than we do for the **mall**? Should we not dress in our best to receive the Lord Jesus Christ himself in the Holy Eucharist, not only to thank him...but also to convey to others what is most important to us?

In my favorite novel—*Island of the World*, by **Michael D. O’Brien**—the main character, **Josip Lasta**, says:

“...clothing is a language of respect...a world of manners that is the basic level of human charity.”

“Island of the World”, 782

Tomorrow I will get on a plane to begin my sabbatical. I know that—especially when I walk by the *Southwest Airlines* boarding gates at the airport tomorrow—I will see passengers—*adults as well as children*—in their **pajamas**...some even holding **teddy bears** and **pillows**! I cringe every time I see this, not **just** because it’s just plain bad taste—“ghetto” as my niece would call it—but *especially* because it reflects a **lack of self-respect**...not to mention **disrespect for others**.

Bad form in an **airport** is one thing. But such bad form—such disrespect—should never occur in the **House of God**—the *Church*.

Now, every time a priest brings up the way parishioners dress for Mass, someone will inevitably say:

“I don’t think Jesus really cares what I wear. Jesus doesn’t love me any less because of what I wear.”

I always answer:

“Jesus’ love for us is *never* in question. The real question is, ‘Do you love Jesus enough to wear your best for *him*?’”

This is one of the **great marks of the Saints**—to live a life of **visible gratitude** to the Lord for his goodness to us. We need **visible Saints** now, more than ever, during this troubled time in the Church.

Jesus humbled himself by taking on our humanity, and by doing so, **clothed us** in his glory...beginning at our Baptism.

What a perfect opportunity we have to demonstrate—publicly—our **gratitude** to Jesus, by dressing for Mass like it’s the most important thing on earth...and in a manner that **communicates to those around us** that we **really** believe that.