



YEAR A – JANUARY 12, 2020 – BAPTISM OF JESUS

Today we celebrate the feast of the Baptism of Jesus. Jesus accepted baptism from St. John to show us the way into the family of God. He didn't need to be baptized. We do.

A couple years ago, I shared a story about an interesting custom in Nigeria. When a child is baptized there, the ceremony is usually followed by a very happy reception where the whole compound gets together to celebrate, and the children are the center of attention. Everyone gets to eat abundantly, and the main staple of the banquet is rice.

As a result of this rice eating, the baptismal gown in Nigeria is referred to as a “rice dress”. Although the connection between baptism and rice is totally accidental, that word can be used as a memory aid to recall the meaning of baptism.

The word “RICE” can be used as an acronym. Each letter can remind us of one of the important aspects of baptism.

“R” can stand for “Rebirth”. In baptism we are re-born by water and the Holy Spirit. We are cleansed from original sin and we become adopted sons and daughters of God in a very special sacramental way.

The letter “I” can stand for “Initiation”. At baptism we are initiated into full membership into the church established by Jesus, the family of God here on earth.

“C” can stand for “Consecration”. In baptism we are consecrated and dedicated to seeking and spreading the kingdom of God. We are committed to be servants of God in the part of the world in which we live. We do that, by loving God and loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. Recall the 10 commandments and the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

And finally, the letter “E” is for “Empowerment”. At baptism the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and empowers us to say no to evil and yes to what is good.

In our culture, rice is usually associated with weddings. In Nigeria, rice is associated with baptism. We sometimes think, as Americans, that the rest of the world must learn from us, if it wants to be civilized. But God can teach us things worth knowing from other cultures too. The conjunction of Baptism and rice in Nigeria is just one such example.

What is it about the Holy Sacrament of Baptism that makes us different from people who are not baptized? Does baptism give us privileges and responsibilities that others don't have? If you answer yes, what are they? How would you explain your answer to a child who asks that question.?

For a few moments in prayerful silence, reflect on this? Can people tell if you are baptized by the way you talk and the way you act? What is “different” about you?

