

Jesus the Recipient

The Baptism of the Lord (Year C)

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Whenever we think of Jesus, we may think of him as a mover and shaker. The Gospels are full of activity on his part: preaching, teaching, traveling, healing, and gathering people together. Judging from the fact that the Church founded by Jesus is still around today is a testament to his influence and his ability to get things done. Jesus certainly was very driven and active in his life. However, there is another aspect of Jesus that we must keep in mind: his passivity.

Passivity is not a bad word, even though it carries negative connotations today. Whenever we hear passivity, we think of someone who stays quiet in the face of injustice, lets other people walk all over them, or lives in fear. But, passivity simply is the acceptance of what happens without resistance or reaction. In the case of Jesus, God's grace was what happened and he accepted it without resistance or reaction. That is a totally positive form of passivity.

Jesus' passivity comes across very clearly in today's feast and Gospel reading from *Luke*: the baptism of the Lord. In this scene, Jesus is not the minister, the mover and shaker, or the primary actor (as we are so used to). He is simply the receiver, the recipient, and a son. Notice the passive voice: "after all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized." Jesus is not the subject doing the action, but the subject receiving the action. He submitted himself to John the Baptist and to God his Father and allowed them to act upon him.

St. Paul in our second reading to *Titus* makes the point that it is the same with us. As Christians, we are ultimately passive. Even though we are called to do good things, Paul reminds us that God's generous love is "not because of any righteous deeds we had done, but because of his mercy." We are recipients of grace and mercy so much more than givers and doers of good works. We are objects receiving the action much more than subjects doing the action.

Theology takes the passivity of Jesus so seriously that it often speaks of 'the Divine Passivity.' Jesus was passive to the divine. He let the divine take the initiative in

his life. Even though we call Jesus 'God', this is not entirely accurate. Jesus too was dependent on God, the Father. As the Greek Fathers of the Church always emphasized, Jesus was not the Father, the source, or the origin of divinity. Jesus was and eternally is the Son. He was and is the recipient of God, perfectly so.

Even Jesus himself was a passive recipient of God the Father.

How does that make us feel? That the one worship as God was also dependent on God?

As followers of Jesus, yes, we are called to be active in the world. Yet, none of us are the primary actors of history. All of us will come and go. Our job is not so much to be the movers and shakers of the world, but the ones who are recipients of God, a God who says, 'you are my beloved sons and daughters, with whom I am well pleased.' That is what moves and shakes the world.