

## Consent

Baptism of the Lord (Year A)

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True love not only requires desire on behalf of the giver, but also consent on behalf of the receiver. If consent is lacking, love is only partial, if not flat out a violation of the receiver's freedom.

In our Gospel passage from *Matthew*, we hear the scene about Jesus' baptism, which is today's feast. In this version, John feels uncomfortable with Jesus coming to him to be baptized. He thinks it should be the other way around. As John says to Jesus, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me?" In reply, Jesus says, "allow it now." In other words, consent. Just as Jesus consents to John's baptism, John consents to baptizing the Lord.

Fr. Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk and spiritual guide, using the theology of Holy Cross priest Fr. John Dunne, speaks of the importance of giving our consent to God. He outlines 4 consents we are to give to God throughout our lives. They are based on the natural progression of life, even though we may resist these consents and not act our age.

The first consent is the childhood consent. Here, we consent to the basic goodness of our nature in all its parts. This is where we learn how to engage with life and the external world on a basic level. We consent to our existence.

The second consent is that of early adolescence. In this consent, we accept the full development of our being by activating our talents and creative energies. This is where we begin to assume responsibility for

ourselves, think of our future, and try to grow. We consent to our development.

The third consent is early adulthood. This involves a shift. It is where we accept the fact of our non-being and diminution of self that occurs through illness, old age, and death. This consent is much harder than the previous two and is one we shy away from. We consent to our limitations.

The fourth and final consent, the one that all the others lead up to and is “the most difficult of all” is that of adulthood, the consent to be transformed. This is where we allow ourselves to be changed. At this point, we have moved beyond telling ourselves we are good, we have moved beyond our success stories, we have moved beyond the bitterness of our failures, and finally get over ourselves. “Transformation,” Keating says, “means the consent to the death of the false self.” When we finally consent to the death of our false self, then we have found our true self.

In summary, Fr. Keating says, “this gradual training in consent, beginning with what is most positive and easiest to make, is the school in which God brings us gently, step by step, to accept more and more of his plan and then to move into the divine union that vastly transcends what any human eye or imagination can even grasp in the smallest degree of what he has in store for those who make these consents, who love him.”

*God wants to be in an ever deepening union with him, but he waits for our consent(s).*

On this feast of the baptism of the Lord, many of us may have been baptized as infants and have not had to consent to it. But baptism is just the start of a relationship with God. The goal of Christianity isn't baptism, but ultimately to consent to transformation.