

Some of you may remember a puzzle featured weekly in the cartoon section of the Sunday newspaper years ago. It was called "What's wrong with this picture?" The reader would be challenged to find inaccuracies in each of the puzzles. For example, on a writing desk there is a calendar with the date June 31. There are only 30 days in June or a plane flying overhead a Civil War battle. Obviously, there were no planes flying in the mid nineteenth century.

Now consider today's gospel (Mk. 1:7-11). "It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized in the Jordan by John (Mk. 1:9). In the midst of a crowd of people, Jesus, the Holy One, appears in the midst of a crowd of people in the role of a lowly, repentant sinner. He stands in line with thieves, prostitutes, tax collectors and other miscreants. Huh? Even John the Baptist is stunned when Jesus presents himself. "It is I who should be baptized by you, and yet you come to me". He identifies himself with sinful humanity, even submitting to a baptism of repentance. He adopted the posture of a sinner out of sympathy and compassion to let all sinners know he loved them and would liberate them from humanity's worst evil, which is sin. To quote Saint Paul: "For our sake he made him to be sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21)

His solidarity with sinners begins at his baptism and will lead necessarily to the cross. He will be counted among the wicked. Later in Mark's gospel Jesus will refer to his death as a baptism. (Mk. 10:38). Immersion in water is a sign of death in Sacred Scripture.

Only recently I received a post card from a friend of my family. On the face of the card is an image of one of Fritz Eichenberg's splendid works, "Christ of the Breadlines" It depicts Jesus standing in line with bedraggled, famished adults awaiting a handout. Where did he get the idea? He gave the following answer:

"I was living in New York and remembered that courtyard on Mott Street so vividly. There was a table in the middle with a kerosene lamp. There were people leaning out of the windows shouting to each other. And that breadline curled around the block with these ragged men and women, so injured and yet with a kind of silent dignity. I was moved by that sight, and imagined Christ with them".

Christ comes down to us. He walks the walk. He takes our burdens upon his shoulders.

The Baptism of the Lord marks the beginning of his public ministry. It will end in the city of Jerusalem. Jesus is "the beloved Son". We, too are beloved by God. Our daily challenge is to walk with him to wherever he chooses to lead us.