

01.13.2019 - Baptism of the Lord (1st Sunday of the Year) – Homily

Is 40: 1-5, 9-11 Ti 2:11-14; 3:4-7 Lk 3:15-16, 21-22

Today we celebrate the feast of Baptism of our Lord Jesus. This Feast marks the conclusion of the Christmas Season and the beginning of Ordinary Time. It is a feast of transition from Jesus' hidden life to that of His public ministry. It also echoes the theme of the Epiphany in that the Baptism of the Lord is another manifestation announcing Jesus' divinity to all of His first followers and to the disciples of John the Baptist. After his baptism, he set out on a very public mission that would take him far beyond Nazareth. This mission was to touch the lives of many of his contemporaries and of people all over the world in every succeeding generation. In coming to John for baptism, Jesus was showing that he wanted to journey with us in all our brokenness and frailty, in all our proneness to failure and sin.

This feast is inviting us to reflect on our own baptism. Gifts wrappings and presentation boxes make gifts so much more attractive. However, at times they may distract us a little from the gift itself. The Gospel accounts of Christ's baptism are full of drama as our own baptism is full of attractive rituals. It would be a pity if these baptismal wrappings distract us from what they are meant to highlight. They highlight the fact that at his baptism Christ was commissioned to carry out his mission of bringing justice to all.

What is justice? In the biblical sense, justice is "meeting need" wherever it exists and particularly where it exists most helplessly. Christ was commissioned to bring this justice not to the selected few but to all. When we are christened at our baptism the Christ – ing appoints us to our Christian vocation.

That is why the day when a person is baptized is more important than when a person is ordained priest or bishop, for if one is not anointed at

baptism to carry out the mission of Christ, he can neither a priest nor a bishop.

At baptism, a believer puts on Christ, a new robe of righteousness to display to the world and a new cord of justice to establish in the world. Thus, our baptism is dynamic; it points back to the work of God in us and forward to the life of faith. We are inclined to speak of our baptism in the past tense, “I was baptized” implying, perhaps that our baptism is a static event now over and done with. It would be better to say, “I am baptized”, meaning that baptism is an ongoing experience to be lived out daily. Therefore, the question we must ask ourselves is whether as members of the new messianic people we are available to God as his instruments to bring justice to all.

Though Jesus’ mission was for all, he was commissioned to bring justice to sinners, to the poor and the little ones of Society. This is the reason why he allowed himself to be baptized. The baptism of St John the Baptist was a baptism of repentance. It was a sign that the people repented their sins. But Jesus was sinless, always God’s beloved Son. In spite of it, if he still chose to be baptized, it was to show his solidarity with us sinners, needing forgiveness, it was to identify himself with the poor, the distressed and oppressed, needing justice.

Therefore, after the example of Christ and by virtue of our own baptism, we have been called to serve the cause of justice. The cause of justice that calls us to serve leaves us in no doubt as to where and how it needs to be served today.

1. The cause of justice calls us to free ourselves from the false values of our Society so that we can see those of other cultures and races as people like us and as God’s children.
2. The cause of justice calls us to mourn the sins that enslave us, the sin of unemployment and hunger in the midst of plenty and the sin of exploitation of the weak by the strong.

3. The cause of justice calls us to offer our compassion for those who are depressed and lonely, for those who live under stress and fear of sexual harassments and other harassments because they belong to a particular ethnic group.
4. The cause of justice calls us to work for healing between those who are burning with hatred, to build the kingdom of love where none shall despise another, where none shall discriminate against another, where all shall be caring, loving children of a compassionate and all-embracing God.

So the question we, as baptized children of God, must ask:

1. To what extent are we ready to identify ourselves with the poor and the oppressed in a concrete tangible and practical ways in order to relieve their burdens as much as we can?"
2. How deeply are we involved in the plight of people, in order to bring sight where there is blindness and racism, light where is darkness and ignorance, freedom where there is oppression and ill-treatment?"

In today's Gospel, we are told about the secret power of Jesus Christ. St. Luke says that it is the Holy Spirit who came and descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove when he was baptized. The Holy Spirit, the power of God, anointed him. When the Spirit came upon Jesus at Baptism the Spirit empowered him to heal and to teach, to give up his life on the cross for humanity and finally to rise from the dead.

Our baptism day was the day when God said to us what was said to Jesus on his baptism day, 'You are my son/my daughter, the beloved, my favor rests on you'. The special place that Jesus holds in God's heart was extended to each of us on the day of our baptism. The Holy Spirit who came down on Jesus on the day of his baptism came down on us.

1. This Holy Spirit is a power that transforms us interiorly that stimulates man's thirst for spiritual truth.

2. It is the power of conviction, of cleansing the heart and of strengthening the will.
3. When this power enters into lethargic Christians, they become active and enthusiastic and become instruments of God and lead them to work for the cause of justice by considering all as sons and daughters of God.

The other sacraments are given to us as moments when we can renew our baptism and respond more fully to our baptismal calling.

1. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we acknowledge the ways that we have failed to live our baptism and open ourselves afresh to the Lord's gift of his Spirit.
2. In the Eucharist we gather together to publicly proclaim our baptismal identity and be nourished and sustained on our baptismal journey by the word of the Lord and the Lord's body and blood.
3. Today is a good day to celebrate our baptism and also give thanks for our parents, whose faith carried us to the baptismal font.

Let us pray:

Lord, Thank you for my parents whose faith carried me to the baptismal font. I believe that you are the Son of the Eternal Father and the Savior of the World. I believe that you have brought about a new era of grace and truth and that I, through the sacrament of baptism, am called to follow you wherever you lead. As I begin this liturgical season of Ordinary Time, may it be a time of extraordinary grace in which I daily heed your choice/voice and continue the Mission of your beloved Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus, I trust in you.