

Homily Notes for Sunday, January 12, 2020, Baptism of the Lord A

Readings: Is 42:1-4, 6-7; Acts 10:34-38; Mt 3:13-17

Introduction: The Baptism of the Lord is the first public revelation of all the Three Persons in the **Holy Trinity**, and the official revelation of **Jesus as the Son of God** to the world by God the Father. Hence, it is described by all four Gospels. It marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Readings

1. Is 42: This is the first of four of the songs of the suffering servant in Isaiah. It identifies the "suffering servant" as "my chosen one with whom I (God) am well pleased." These are the words describing Jesus at his baptism.

2. Acts 10: Peter here identifies Jesus's baptism by John as the beginning of Jesus's ministry.

3. Mt 3: The baptism of Jesus. Jesus said it was necessary to fulfill "all righteousness" (justice). Notice that it is the descent of the Holy Spirit that gave John the Baptist unmistakable proof of the genuineness of his testimony concerning Christ (cf. Jn 1:29-34). The holy Spirit descends on him (the Son) in the form of a dove; and the voice of the Father gives testimony about his Son. Hence, Christians must be baptized in the name of the three divine persons (See Matt 28:19-20).

4. Why did Jesus, the sinless Son of God, receive the "baptism of repentance" meant for sinners?

First, in this humble submission, we see a foreshadowing of the "baptism" of his bloody death upon the cross.

Second, Jesus' baptism by John was the acceptance and the beginning of his mission as God's suffering Servant.

Third, He allowed himself to be numbered among sinners which we should also do.

Fourth, Jesus submitted himself entirely to his Father's will.

The Fathers of the Church point out that the words which the Voice of the Heavenly Father speaks are similar to Psalm 2:7, revealing Jesus' identity ("*This is my beloved Son*") and to Isaiah 42:1 referring to the "suffering servant" ("*with whom I am well pleased*"), revealing Jesus' mission of saving mankind by His suffering and death.

5. What did this baptism represent?

First, it marked the beginning of Jesus's public ministry. It marked the end of Jesus' private life which had prepared him for his public ministry. After his baptism he began calling his disciples unto himself, revealing himself powerfully to them with the miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

Second, it was a moment of identification with his people and their sin, taking upon himself the sins of all the people. God also announced for the world to know that this Jesus is His beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased, using language reflecting the "suffering servant (Isaiah)."

Third, it was a moment of identity. At this baptism, Jesus was identified by God as the Chosen One" and the "beloved Son of God"; and that his mission of saving mankind would be fulfilled, not by conquering the Romans, but by becoming the "suffering servant" of God, i.e., by the cross (cf Isa 42).

Fourth, it was a sign of the presence of the Holy Trinity in Christian baptism. The descent of the Spirit of God represented by the dove, and the words of the Father, show how this baptism was an act of the Holy Trinity. It also shows why we are baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

6. Think what Baptism means for us: (See CCC 1213ff, especially 1262ff)?

#1265 "Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte a "new creature," an adopted son of God, who has become a "partaker of the divine nature," member of Christ and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy spirit."

#1266 "The Most Holy Trinity gives the baptized sanctifying grace, the grace of justification:

- Enabling them to believe in God, to hope in him, and to love him through the theological virtues;
- Giving them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit;
- Allowing them to grow in goodness through the moral virtues.
- Furthermore, baptism makes us members of the Body of Christ.
- It incorporates us into the Church.
- By baptism we share in the priesthood of Christ, in his prophetic and royal mission. We become “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people that (they) may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called (them) out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).
- In baptism we become temples of the Holy Spirit. This is why we must take care of our bodies. We cannot treat our bodies with disrespect both before and after our death. This is particularly true of any sins against the body, that would defile our body, in any way. This is particularly true of sexual sins, the sins against the sixth and ninth commandments.
- By baptism we all share in the three-fold mission of Jesus, that of prophecy, priest, and king.

7. Look at how wonderful Baptism is for us! We can see from the effects of baptism how we baptism totally changes us. So, we have to live a new life. How beautiful the Christian life to which we have been called. We should show forth the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the whole organism of the Christian’s supernatural life has its roots in Baptism. Consider what are the fruits: “charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity” (Gal 5:22-23) This really is our destiny. We are called to fulfill it, with the help of God. How much does the world need us to live this out in order to give testimony to this possibility!

8. Hence, "Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit and the door which gives access to the other Sacraments" (CCC, #1213).

9. Only mortal sin can take that away from us. Committing a mortal sin is like throwing God’s grace back into his face, “I do not care for this.”

10. Jesus’ baptism reminds us that we are:

- a). To live the new life as children of God,** temples of the Holy Spirit, especially showing forth the fruits of the Holy Spirit Gal. 5:22-23.
- b) to experience the presence of God within us,** that we have become temples of the Holy Spirit, to acknowledge our own dignity as God’s children, and to appreciate the Divine Presence in others by honoring them, loving them and serving them in all humility;
- c) to grow daily in intimacy with God** by personal and family prayers, by reading the Word of God, by participating in the Holy Mass, and by frequenting the Sacrament of Reconciliation;
- d) to live as the children of God** in thought, word and action so that our Heavenly Father may say to each one of us what He said to Jesus: "You are my beloved son/daughter with whom I am well pleased";
- e) to lead a holy and transparent Christian life** and not to desecrate our bodies (the temples of the Holy Spirit and members of Jesus' Body) by impurity, injustice, intolerance, jealousy or hatred;
- f) to be co-creators with God, as disciples, in building up the “Kingdom of God” on earth,** a Kingdom of compassion, justice and love; to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

9) This is the day for us to recommit ourselves to our calling as Christians by remembering the graces we have received in Baptism and by renewing our Baptismal promises. We should remember the date of our baptism just as much as the date of our physical birth.

Supplemental reflections:

On the day of our baptism, as Pope John Paul II explains, "We were anointed with the Oil of Catechumens, the sign of Christ's gentle strength, to fight against evil. Blessed water was poured over us, an effective sign of interior purification through the gift of the Holy Spirit. We were then anointed with Chrism to show that we were thus consecrated in the image of Jesus, the Father's Anointed One. The candle lighted from the Paschal Candle was a symbol of the light of faith which our parents and godparents must have continually safeguarded and nourished with the life-giving grace of the Spirit."

10. This is also a day for us to renew our Baptismal promises, consecrating ourselves to the Holy Trinity and "rejecting Satan and all his empty promises," which our profane world is constantly offering us through its mass-media of communication. Let us ask Our Lord today to make us faithful to our Baptismal promises. Let us thank Him for the privilege of being joined to His mission of preaching the "Good News" by our transparent Christian lives of love, mercy, service and forgiveness.

11. The use of holy water is a reminder of our baptism. Most of us dipped the fingers of our right hands into the holy water font and blessed ourselves when we came into church today. *Why?* This blessing is supposed to remind us of our Baptism. And so when I bless myself with Holy Water, I should be thinking of the fact that I am a child of God; that I have been redeemed by the Cross of Christ; that I have been made a member of God's family and that I have been washed, forgiven, cleansed and purified by the Blood of the Lamb and called to witness to Him in the world.

2) Three times: Too many people come to Church three times primarily. They're baptized, they get married, and they have their funeral service at the Church. The first time they throw water on you, the second time rice, the third time dirt! Do you think that kind of behavior will get you to heaven?

1) Thomas Merton: A young man once described his experience of sinking into insanity. He was a very bright university student, but he had abandoned his studies in favor of nightclubs and pornography. One night he retired to a hotel room. As he lay in bed, the window appeared to expand until it reached the floor. He heard a mocking voice in his mind saying, "What if you threw yourself out of that window?" The young man wrote: "Now my life was dominated by something I had never known before: fear (could it have also been demonic?). It was humiliating, this strange self-conscious watchfulness. It was a humiliation I had deserved more than I knew. I had refused to pay attention to the moral laws upon which all vitality and sanity depend." Well, this young man did begin to pay attention to the moral law. He began to put his life in order - and to experience inner peace. He eventually entered the Catholic Church and went on to become one of the most famous monks of the twentieth century. His name is Thomas Merton. Today's Gospel on Jesus' baptism should challenge us, too, to examine whether we are keeping our Baptismal promises (Fr. Phil Bloom).

2. Background: Origin of baptism: Neither John nor Jesus invented baptism. It had been practiced for centuries among the Jews as a ritual equivalent to our Confession. Until the fall of the Temple in 70 A.D., it was common for Jewish people to use a special pool called a *Mikveh* -- literally a "collection of water" - as a means of spiritual cleansing, to remove spiritual impurity and sin. Men took this bath weekly on the eve of the Sabbath; women, monthly. Converts were also expected to take this bath before entering Judaism. The Orthodox Jews still retain the rite. John preached that such a bath was a necessary preparation for the cataclysm that would be wrought by the coming Messiah. Jesus transformed this continuing ritual into the one single, definitive act by which we begin our life of faith. In effect, He fused His Divine Essence with the water used in the sacrament of baptism.