

## **Let us Remember our Baptism**

Baptism of the Lord - Lk 3:15-16, 21-22

Ave Maria Catholic Church, January 8, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

Today's Feast of the Baptism of the Lord marks the conclusion of the Christmas Season and the beginning of Ordinary Time. It's a feast of transition from Jesus' hidden life to His public ministry. It also brings to mind memories of the Epiphany because the Baptism of the Lord is another manifestation of Jesus. In this sacred event in the life of Jesus, He makes his divinity known to his first followers and to the disciples of John the Baptist.

But first, there is a question we need to answer: why does Jesus want to be baptized when He has no need of the baptism of John? John was baptizing as a call to and sign of interior repentance. Jesus had no need to repent. He is the Holy of Holies, but, nevertheless, He comes to John. It is not surprising that John resists at first, but Jesus insists. Why does Jesus receive baptism?

The works of God are always perfect, and for that reason, we can find what is fitting in his actions. It was fitting to receive the baptism of John:

First, because by accepting the baptism of John, Jesus affirms what John has said and done. Jesus affirms John's vocation of preparing the way for the Messiah and for ushering into a new era of grace. Therefore, the Baptism of Jesus acts as a bridge between the Old Testament prophets (of which John was the last) and the New Testament era of grace and truth which is brought about by Jesus.

Second, Jesus wanted to be baptized to sanctify the waters. When Jesus entered the waters of baptism, He was not sanctified by the waters, but rather, with his Baptism the created waters of this world were, in a sense, "baptized" by Him. By entering into the waters, Jesus sanctified water and poured forth his grace making all water the future source of salvation.

Third, the Baptism of Jesus was an epiphany. It was a moment of manifestation. As He emerged from the waters, *heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'* This manifestation of the sonship and divinity of Jesus took place in a physical, audible, and visible way so that all people present would know, without question, that Jesus was the Son of the Father. The baptism of Jesus is a way in which the Father introduced his Son and his Son's mission to the world.

The baptism of Jesus is a great mystery. In the same way, our baptism is a great mystery. Baptism is that great mystery *which no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man* (1 Cor 2.9). We see water, something that is visible to us, but there is a power that we cannot see, invisible but real that creates new children of God, people reborn to new life.

There is something invisible that we cannot see with our human eyes. Only faith perceives it: it is the communication of God's grace.

### **The communication of grace is an action attributed to the Holy Spirit**

In the very beginning, when God made heaven and earth, it is said that *"the Spirit moved upon the waters,"* (Gen 1.2). Now, He who was moving upon the waters, was He not working upon the waters? Certainly, He was.

Water gives life, water has a cleansing power, but water without the Spirit is useless. St. Luke's gospel offers the testimony of John the Baptist and his teaching on the necessity of the Holy Spirit because water does not cleanse without the Spirit. John the Baptist said: *"I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire,"* (Lc 3:16).

St. John's Gospel also highlights the action of the Holy Spirit in the testimony of John: *"The one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit,'"* (John 1: 32).

### **Now, the communication of grace follows the Trinitarian confession of faith**

In the Sacrament of Baptism, we confessed our Trinitarian faith. This Trinitarian confession was explicitly presented by Christ after his resurrection and before his ascension. Jesus said: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,"* (Mt 28: 18).

**1. Faith in the Father who loves us:** As Jesus explains to Nicodemus, *"For God, so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life"* (Jn. 3:14).

**2. Faith in the Son who redeems us:** Because Jesus is the cornerstone and *"There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved,"* (Acts 4: 11-12).

**3. Faith in the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us:** since *God chose us for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit,* (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

### **After this confession we die to sin**

We are buried in those waters. The water has the power to be destructive, because it has the power to kill or to destroy what does not belong to God. This is the teaching of Saint Paul in the letter to the Romans, *"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?"* (Rom 6:3).

## **But we also rise again to eternal life**

Through Jesus's death and resurrection, the waters of baptism have power to give life. As Saint Paul teaches: *"If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also,"* (Rom 8: 11).

We went down into the water, we professed faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Water touched our bodies, and the grace of God cleansed our souls. We died to sin, and we were born to a new life in Christ.

St. John Paul II (in *Novo Millennio Ineunte*) calls baptism "the gift of holiness." And he said: *"To ask catechumens: 'Do you wish to receive Baptism?' means at the same time to ask them: 'Do you wish to become holy?'"*

Let us give thanks to God for the grace of baptism, let us renew our baptismal promises and live a life worthy of our call. Let us listen to St. Leo the Great who challenges us: *"Christian recognize your dignity and, now that you share in God's own nature, do not return to your former base by sinning. Remember who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Never forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of the Kingdom of God."* Amen