

## **Baptism of the Lord A/2008**

Being human is growing from birth to death, from youth to adulthood. Each step in this process of life is meaningful and worthy of being lived out as it should. After all the festivities of Christmas focusing on the infancy of Jesus, today's readings present to us an important step in the life of Jesus as a young man, ready to enter his public life.

That public life starts with his baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan, as we heard in the second reading. In fact, in his letter Peter recapitulates the whole life of Jesus, showing how he began in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, and how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit in order to do good and bring healing to the oppressed. Even though he had a hard task, Jesus accomplished his mission as a faithful servant of the Lord, because God was with him.

All that helps us understand why the first reading focuses on the prophecy of Isaiah where the image of the servant of the Lord is portrayed. In this text, Isaiah says that God chose this servant because he was pleased with him. He has endowed him with his Spirit so that he brings justice to the nation and his teaching to the end of the world. As gentle as he is, he does not act by force, but rather with kindness. For that, he does not raise his voice in the streets, he does not destroy what is already falling down, but tries to repair and recover.

A retrospective look of this text shows that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. God the Father has formed him from the womb of Mary and sent him to be the covenant of the peoples and the light of the nations. Through his action, the blind have seen and the needy consoled. But, at what moment did Jesus receive the power to fulfill this mission? Which important event has opened the starting of his mission? That moment is the baptism in the Jordan.

First of all, let us say that the baptism of Jesus by John raises serious questions that each Christian should necessarily know if we want to understand the relevance of our faith. – Given that Jesus was the son of God and was born without human intervention, did he really need to be baptized? Furthermore, by accepting to be baptized by John, did not Jesus put himself in a position of inferiority with regard to John? Finally, given that John's baptism was for the repentance of sin, why did Jesus as a Son of God let himself be baptized? How did he live that baptism?

Beyond any question, we have to recognize that Jesus' baptism by John is an authentic event that really took place. Given that that baptism put Jesus in a position of inferiority vis-à-vis John, and in spite of all that, the apostles have kept its memory and track in the Gospel, it means that it was really true. John himself has perceived that difficulty. It is for that at the beginning of today's Gospel, there is a discussion between Jesus and John on who has to baptize the other.

If, nevertheless, Jesus let himself be baptized, the reason is that he wanted to assume the whole of our human condition with all its incidents, except sin. It is for that reason, also, that he asks John to allow the baptism to happen so that all

righteousness might be fulfilled. In that perspective, the purpose of Jesus' baptism is the fulfillment of God's saving plan.

Moreover, by letting himself be baptized, Jesus gives to baptism a new value, first of all, for himself, and for us alike. In fact, the baptism is for Jesus an opportunity the Father uses to reveal his identity to the world. The voice from heaven declares it clearly: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased". In this perspective, Jesus is the beloved Son of the Father on whom rests his Holy Spirit. Consequently, whoever welcomes Jesus, welcomes the Father; whoever listens to Jesus listens to the Father; whoever accepts Jesus, accepts the Father. In the same way, whoever rejects Jesus rejects the Father.

By letting himself be baptized, Jesus gives also to baptism a sacramental character. In fact, through our baptism we are sanctified and recognized as sons and daughters of God as Jesus was. That is why in the sacrament of baptism we are cleansed from original sin and introduced into the family of the children of God. In that sense, whoever lets himself be baptized receives the forgiveness of his sins and the life of the children of God.

Another point is that, by accepting to be baptized by John while he was without sin, Jesus gives us an example of humility and conversion of heart. In fact, Jesus wants to teach us that no human being can approach God without making amend of sins and convert. All over his ministry, Jesus will insist again and again on the necessity of conversion and the repentance of sin in order to belong to God's Kingdom. God's kingdom is a gift that is offered to anyone without distinction; the only condition to enter it is to convert and to believe in Jesus.

Finally, the whole picture of Jesus' baptism teaches us something about the nature of God, namely that God is a mystery that is revealed to us bit by bit in human history as a Trinitarian God\_ The voice that proclaims at the baptism of Jesus that "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am pleased" is the voice of the Father. The Spirit that descended like a dove and came upon Jesus is the Spirit of the Father. Thus, in Jesus' baptism, God reveals himself more fully than he did with the shepherds or the magi at the birth of Jesus. He reveals his presence as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

In baptism are expressed the love of God for us, the mission of the Son for the salvation of the world and the consecration by the Holy Spirit. It is for that reason, it seems to me, that Jesus has recommended his disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. As we celebrate the baptism of the Lord, let us ask him to turn our hearts to the grace of conversion and embrace him as he reveals to us as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. May he help us live openly the engagement of our baptism! May God bless you all!

**Isaiah 42, 1-4. 6-7; Acts 10, 34-38; Matthew 3, 13-17**



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