

## **Baptism of the Lord C/2010**

The physical as well as psychological growth of a person is always a long process that has to go through many steps before the individual comes to full maturity of life. Each step is as important as the development of the individual advances. As a human being, Jesus had to pass through some stages of life in order to assume the requirements of Jewish society and the stipulations of the Law before fulfilling the mission received from his Father.

Thus, after his birth in Bethlehem, his revelation to the magi and the presentation in the temple, Jesus has to be baptized by John in the Jordan River. The Baptism by John was an important ritual in the life of the Jewish people. But it was also an important moment in the life of Jesus that would reveal his true identity and mark the beginning of his public ministry.

Jesus will fulfill this ministry in the line of the prophecy already given in the Old Testament through the mouth of Isaiah. That is why the first reading recapitulates the mission of the servant of the Lord who is sent to comfort God's people, to speak tenderly to the heart of Jerusalem, and to proclaim a time of expiation of sin and salvation. At that time, Zion will become a herald of good news to the surrounding cities of Judah. God will come in its midst with a mighty arm to rescue his people. He will care for them as a shepherd tends and feeds his flock.

By his incarnation in the world, Jesus has fulfilled this prophecy of Isaiah by bringing us God's salvation. He has delivered us from lawlessness and cleansed us from our sins so that we become God's people, eager to do what is good. In him God has manifested his mercy toward us and saved us through the bath of baptism and renewed us through the pouring of the Holy Spirit. Through Jesus Christ, God has saved us so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life, St Paul says in the second reading.

Jesus has obtained for us all these graces by his incarnation as the Son of God and the sinless one. If we believe this statement to be true, why, then, did Jesus, the sinless Son of God, receive the baptism of repentance meant for sinners? Why did he wait for thirty years to begin his public ministry? Given that as a Son of God, he was born without human intervention; did Jesus really need to be baptized? Plus, by accepting to be baptized, did not Jesus put himself in a position of inferiority with regard to John the Baptist?

These are questions each Christian should consider if one wants to understand the true identity of Jesus. As a matter of fact, Jesus did not truly need a baptism of repentance of sins for the conversion of heart. He has accepted to be baptized in order to identify himself with human beings and to give us an example of submission and obedience to the Father.

Many Fathers of the Church have explained that Jesus received baptism in order to identify himself with his people of Israel, who for the first time in Jewish history, became aware of their sins and of the need of repentance, as a result of John's preaching. At the same time,

Jesus' Baptism was a moment of decision marking the end of his private life and the beginning of his public ministry.

Second, by being baptized, Jesus gives to baptism a new value for himself and for us alike. In fact, Baptism was for Jesus an opportunity the Father used to reveal his identity to the world. As the Gospel says, at that particular moment, a voice came from heaven and declared: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am pleased". In this perspective, Jesus received assurances from heaven about his identity and his mission. For us, through Jesus' Baptism, the Father gives us certainty that Jesus is the messenger he has sent to be our redeemer and the savior of the world.

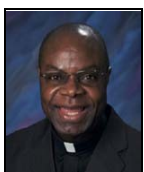
Third, by being baptized, Jesus gives to baptism a sacramental character. In fact, through our baptism we are sanctified and made sons and daughters of God. That is why in the sacrament of baptism we are cleansed from original sin and introduced into the family of the children of God, which is the Church. In that sense, whoever lets himself be baptized receives the forgiveness of his sins and the life of the children of God within him.

Fourth, by being baptized while he was sinless, Jesus gives us an example of humility and conversion of heart. In fact, Jesus wants to teach us that no one can belong to God without renouncing sins. Throughout his ministry, Jesus will insist on the necessity of conversion and the repentance of sin in order to belong to God's Kingdom. Although God's kingdom is a gift, it requires, however, our conversion of heart and our faith in Jesus.

Finally, the whole picture of Jesus' baptism teaches us something about the nature of God as a Trinitarian God. The voice that came from heaven and declared, "You are my beloved son", was that of the Father. The Holy Spirit that descended like a dove upon Jesus was the Spirit of the Father. Thus, in Jesus' baptism, God reveals himself more fully to the world 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. It is for that reason that Jesus has recommended his disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

As we celebrate the baptism of our Lord today, let us remember the graces we have received in our own Baptism and renew our baptismal vows. Let us ask Our Lord to make us faithful to our Baptismal promises. May he give us the courage to change our lives, reject Satan and his empty promises, and believe in him as he reveals to us as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. May he help us live openly the engagements of our baptism! May God bless you all!

**Isaiah 40, 1-5, 9-11; Titus 2, 11-14; 3, 4-7; Luke 3, 15-16, 21-22**



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