

## **Feast of the Baptism of the Lord C/2013**

The readings of this feast focus on the baptism of our Lord as a moment of revelation of Jesus to the world by the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit. They invite us to accept Jesus as our savior and to recognize him as the messenger of the Father.

The first reading of the book of Isaiah recalls the mission of the servant of God sent to comfort the people of Israel by reminding them that their punishment is over and their sins are forgiven. For that reason they had to prepare a way for God, because he was about to come in order to shepherd them like his flock and to gather them under his care.

What is behind this text is the idea of confidence in the presence and the power of God who takes care of his people and heals them from their sins. There is also the idea of the recognition of human dependence upon God and the vision of the declaration of the victory of God over the whole world.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as it talks about the baptism of Jesus. First of all, the Gospel says that the people were filled with expectation and wondering whether John was the Christ. John simply recognized that he was not. He even confessed that his task was to baptize in water, but the one coming after him, who was mightier and worthier than him, will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

Then, the Gospel describes what happened after Jesus had been baptized. It says that, as he was in prayer, the heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. A voice came down from heaven and recognized him as his beloved Son with whom he was pleased.

What do we learn from the Gospel? The first thing I want to highlight is about the deepening of the identity of Jesus as a way of discovering our own identity. In fact, the baptism of Jesus gives us an opportunity to enter a little bit more into the mystery of the identity of Jesus.

First of all, let us consider St Paul's declaration in today's second reading and the exhortation of John the Baptist at the occasion of Baptism in the Jordan.

St Paul's says that Jesus has delivered us from lawlessness and cleansed us so that we become God's people, eager to do what is good. He affirms also that Jesus has justified us by his grace so that we become heirs in hope of eternal life.

By saying so, St Paul recognizes that Jesus is the holy one of God; he is without sin. And yet, the main goal of John the Baptist in inviting the people to Baptism was the repentance from sin. Why, then, did Jesus let himself be baptized while he was sinless?

The Fathers of the Church have resolved this dilemma by saying that Jesus had received baptism in order to identify himself with the 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.

The consequence to draw from such a perception is that, as Jesus was sent to be the savior, not only of the people of Israel, but rather of the whole world, by letting himself be baptized, he identifies with us human beings. In that sense, he has not only assumed

the human condition, but he has shared with us the prize of what it means to be human, with the exception of sin. That is why in his baptism, Jesus teaches us the importance of repentance from sins as a necessary step without which we cannot have a share with him and please his Father.

Moreover, at the moment of Baptism, the Father recognized Jesus as his beloved son with whom he was pleased. If that is the case, it means that Baptism makes us all children of God. That is why our true identity is to be children of God and coheirs with Jesus. But, in order to have access to that dignity, we have to repent from our sins and to allow the conversion of heart to happen within us. Without these two realities, it is impossible to please God and to befriend Jesus.

Plus, beyond the fact that we are sanctified and made sons and daughters of God, in 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.

The second point I want to highlight is about the mystery of the Holy Trinity. One of the things we learn from the Baptism of Jesus is about the reality of God. In fact, a close observation of the modus operandi of God in Jesus' Baptism shows us that God is not one-sided, but rather relational. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father declares Jesus as his beloved Son with whom he is pleased. And the Holy Spirit descends upon him in bodily form like a dove in order to confirm him in God's grace.

All three persons are but one God. All three live in a strong and mutual relationship of union and interdependence with one another. Their relationship is such that they are united with one another without being confused. That is why they appear all in a single action of the Baptism of Jesus as unique God in order to confirm him in his mission as the savior of the world.

The global picture of God we have, then, is this: 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, let us renew our baptismal vows. May our Lord make us faithful to our baptismal promises! May he give us the courage to change our lives, to reject Satan, and to believe in him as he reveals to us as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. 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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