

The Baptism of the Lord A/2014

All the readings of this celebration talk about the Baptism of our Lord Jesus as a privileged moment where he is confirmed as the messenger of God. They invite us to trust him and believe in him as the beloved Son of the Father.

The first reading of the prophet Isaiah describes the task of the servant of God. It shows that God chose him because he was pleasing to him. He filled him with his Spirit in order to fulfill the mission he intended to give him. It equally shows that he will bring justice to the nations in a very different way than his predecessors. Finally, the text says that the servant of God will reconcile the people with God and bring joy to those in difficult situations.

What is behind this text is the idea that the servant of God is an agent of God's justice to the world. Another idea is that his mission aims at reconciling and healing the people. The last idea is relative to the truth that God prepared his servant adequately so that he might be able to fulfill his mission without failure.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River. First of all, the Gospel recognizes the baptism of Jesus as a historic fact attested by John the Baptist. Then, it reports the discussion that took place between John and Jesus about who has the right to baptize the other.

After that, it shows John's submission to Jesus' request for baptism as fitting to the righteousness of God's kingdom. Finally, the Gospel describes Jesus' baptism and the heavenly manifestations that happened at that very moment.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the baptism of Jesus as a moment of truth for Jesus himself, for John the Baptist and the world.

Usually, the moments of truth are times where people are put to test so that they prove their value, their courage and their worth. This is mostly the case when, after many years of education and upbringing, children have to prove to their parents that they have become mature and capable of taking their responsibility seriously by making sound decisions for their good and their future. The moment of truth can be also at the occasion of a contest where someone succeeds and proves to everybody, sometimes against all the odds, that he is capable.

Sometimes, the moments of truth are those special instances of life and so important that they are decisive, influential and determining of the orientation of the life of someone or of the activities in which he is involved. This is the case of a change happening in the life of someone, but which is so crucial that it determines forever the orientation of his life.

The baptism of Jesus can be seen as such a moment that was determining for his life. In fact, after almost thirty years spent in Nazareth in the house of Mary and Joseph, the time had come for Jesus to start his public ministry. The baptism through the hands of John was the step that opened him to public life. The second reading of the Acts of the Apostles says it very well by showing how the baptism was a privileged moment of the life of Jesus.

But, there was a problem with that baptism. If John's baptism was for the repentance of sin, why would the son of God, born by the will of God and not according to human flesh, let himself be baptized? That explains the discussion we see between John and Jesus about who was to baptize the other.

According to Jesus, it was fitting that it might happen that way so that the righteousness of God might be fulfilled. In that sense, Jesus has set an example for us so that anyone of us may come to repentance before having communion with God. In others words, it is impossible to please God if there is no desire in our hearts to repent of our sins. That is why we have always to examine ourselves how we treat the sacrament of confession. If Jesus has accepted the baptism of repentance, and yet he was without sin, how much more shall we repent of our sin?

Moreover, by accepting to be baptized, Jesus shows that he assumes the human condition totally and completely. But, this moment is also a time of a spiritual birth because God recognizes him as his beloved Son. In that sense, the sacrament of baptism is very important for us. In spite of our birth in the body, we still need a spiritual birth which is given only through the sacrament of baptism.

Then, we understand why the baptism at the Jordan was a moment of truth par excellence. For Jesus, it was a moment of confirmation by the Father that he is truly his son on whom his Holy Spirit rests. Therefore, whoever welcomes him, welcomes the Father; whoever listens to him listens to the Father; whoever accepts him, accepts the Father. In the same away, whoever rejects him rejects the Father.

For John the Baptist, indeed, Jesus' baptism was also a moment of truth for himself because the voice coming from heaven confirmed truly that Jesus was the son of God with whom the Father was pleased. In that sense, he was not wrong for having invited people to repentance of their sins in order to embrace God's salvation brought about through the ministry of Jesus.

For the world, too, represented by those who were present at the river Jordan, Jesus' baptism was a moment of truth. They, too, heard the voice declaring that Jesus was the beloved son of the Father. His identity was clear and well spelled out. Therefore, their eternal salvation depended on listening to Jesus and in following whatever he had to tell them to do. That makes Jesus more than important for the salvation of the world. That is why St Paul says that there is no name given to human beings through which we can have salvation than Jesus.

Let us pray, then, asking God to help us imitate the humility and the spirit of conversion that our Lord teaches through his baptism. Let us ask God to help us listen to his son so that we come to our eternal salvation. May God bless you all!

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



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