

Baptism of the Lord B/2015

The readings of this feast focus on the baptism of Jesus as a moment of revelation and a confirmation that he is the son of God in whom the Father finds his delight. They invite us to listen to him and to form under his guidance the family of the children of God.

The first reading recalls the prophecy of Isaiah that describes the generosity of God who provides for the needs of his people. It portrays God's invitation to his people to live by his liberality. It also expresses God's intention to renew his covenant with them and his desire that they listen to him so that they may have life in abundance.

Then, it insists on the effort God's people should provide in seeking the Lord while it is still time by abandoning their sinful ways and counting on his mercy. Finally, the text insists on the efficiency of the word of God that accomplishes what it is intended for.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the source of all the blessings people enjoy in the world because he provides for all their needs. Another idea is related to the faithfulness of God whose word is efficient because when he speaks, what he promises comes to fulfillment. The last idea is a pressing appeal to conversion of heart that relies on God's forgiveness and mercy.

This text allows us to deepen today's Gospel as it talks about Jesus baptism. First of all, the Gospel starts with the mention of the ministry of John the Baptist. Then, it gives the content of John's teaching as he recognized that the one coming after him was mightier than he to the point that he was unable to untie his sandals. It gives also the appreciation of John who recognized that while he was baptizing with water, the one coming after him will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Finally, the Gospel focuses on the very circumstances of the baptism of Jesus by John. It reports on the revelation that happened at the moment of Jesus' baptism as the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit came upon him and a voice from heaven acknowledged him as the beloved son with whom the Father was pleased.

What do we learn from today's feast? Today I want to talk about the baptism of Jesus as a moment of the revelation of the family of God. First of all, let me say all the evangelists recognize that the baptism of John was of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. His appeal was so strong that almost all the classes of the Jewish society went to him for baptism. It was in that context that Jesus aligned himself with everybody in order to receive baptism.

However, a close look on the identity of Jesus shows that he did not really need a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, because he was without sin. If, nevertheless he has done it, it was in order to assume totally and completely our human nature, at the exception of sin. Moreover, it was in order to give us an example so that we come to understand that there cannot be a true relationship with God if we do not renounce our sins and abandon our old ways of life.

That instance of baptism, which in the life of the Jewish nation, was a response of faith to the appeal of John the Baptist, became a moment of the revelation of the family of God we call Trinity. In fact, at that moment, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus under the form of a dove and the voice from heaven recognized him as the beloved son.

Thus, in the baptism of Jesus, there is the affirmation of the identity of God as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. In that sense, 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.

Such an understanding sheds light on our own identity. In fact, though we are biologically born of our parents, as long as we are not baptized, we are out of the family of God. It is baptism that makes us part of the family of God and coheirs with Jesus.

It is for that reason that in our Parish, anytime there is a baptism of a child, we present him to the congregation by saying that "here is a new member of our community". The logic behind this presentation refers to the understanding that by our baptism we become members of the family of God, which is the Church. In that sense, though people are born of their parents, it is only a biological birth; they need also a spiritual birth that comes with baptism.

In that sense, baptism opens for us the door to the family of God. Like a letter that does not have a stamp is considered illegitimate to be sent abroad by the post office, so is someone who is not baptized. He does not have the mark of the seal of the kingdom that makes him belong to the family of the children of God.

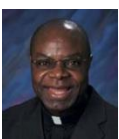
Jesus himself is the first to give us an example about the importance of baptism. He teaches us that the biological birth is not enough in order to win eternal life. We need also a spiritual birth through the baptism. It is for that reason that the Church insists on the sacrament of baptism as the first step in putting ourselves on the way to eternal life.

Baptism requires first of all openness to God, a willingness to renounce sins in embracing the ways of Jesus Christ and an explicit confession of faith. When children are baptized, it is not in virtue of their own confession of faith or renunciation of sins, but rather in virtue of the faith of their parents who vouch for them and pledge to keep them in the light of Jesus Christ. As parents pledge before civil society to give a good education to their children and protect them from any danger so that they come to mature life and become good citizens, so hopes the Church that the parents will do the same in order to ensure a Christian education for their children.

If the parents fail in their role as educators, the civil society can take the children away and give them to competent parents. The Church, on the contrary, does not have that coercive means in order to force the parents to fulfill their Christian commitment. The Church counts on their good will and their pledge before God and their conscience.

May the celebration of the baptism of Jesus help us understand the importance of our spiritual birth! May we care for our belonging to the family of God as we do for civil society! May God bless you all!

Isaiah 55: 1-11; 1 John 5: 1-9; Mark 1: 7-11



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