

## **Feast of the Baptism of the Lord C/2016**

The readings of this feast focus on the baptism of our Lord Jesus. They show that through his baptism in the Jordan, Jesus has been revealed to the world as the beloved son of the Father. They invite us to accept Jesus as our savior and to recognize him as our redeemer.

The first reading of the book of Isaiah describes the powerful action of God who delivers his people. It highlights the importance of repentance as a precondition to the redeeming action of God. It invites us to rejoice in God as he comes to save us.

What is behind this text is the idea that God in his bounty forgives the sin of his people and delivers them from their enemies. Another idea is the importance of repentance and conversion of heart as necessary steps in the approach of God. The last idea is related to the truth that where God shows the power of his arm, his people are in joy and happiness.

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 opens by mentioning the expectations of the people who were wondering whether John was the Christ. Then, it gives the testimony of John who confessed that he was only a baptizer with water, while the one coming after him was mightier and worthier than him to the point of baptizing with the Holy Spirit and fire.

The Gospel ends up with the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan and the revelation of the Father that Jesus was his beloved son with whom he was pleased.

What do we learn from today's readings? Today I want to talk about the revelation of the true identity of Jesus. Let me start with a simple evocation. In fact, when we travel, we are often asked to show our ID, which we do either by way of our card or our passport.

Those documents are the outward signs of who we are or of what society thinks that we are. They are signs by which we can be socially recognized and distinguished from others; but our true identity is in us, we carry it with us, with our person. It cannot be reduced to mere papers like an ID card or a passport. Our true identity is our very self.

So, people had certainly some opinion about Jesus and his identity. The most common way of dealing with him was to identify him as the son of Mary and Joseph, whose relatives were among them. This way of identifying Jesus was limited to how he appeared to them and to their society.

At the baptism in the Jordan, on the contrary, the true identity of Jesus will be revealed, namely that, he was not only the son of Mary, but also the son of God. The witness at the Jordan River was not from social opinion or human beings, but rather from God himself. In fact, God attested before the whole world represented by the people present at the river, that Jesus was his beloved son, with whom he was pleased.

Moreover, at the Jordan, it has been revealed that Jesus is not a lonely person, but rather he lives in communion with the Father, represented by the voice from heaven, and the Holy Spirit, represented by the dove. So, for the first time, in human history, it has been revealed to us that God is a Trinity, that is, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is for that reason that, in Mt 28: 19, when Jesus sends the disciples in the

world, he enjoins them to baptize in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

In that sense, Baptism becomes a moment of shedding light on the identity of Jesus. It illumines the meaning of his life and calls us to reflect on the meaning of our own baptism and life as well. That is why as long as people are not baptized, they are out of the family of God. By baptism, we all become children of God and members of his great family which is the Church.

However, the baptism of Jesus raises a profound question: if Jesus is God, did he really need to be baptized, especially that the baptism of John was for the repentance of sins? 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 their history, became aware of their sins and of the need of repentance, as a consequence of John's preaching.

Moreover, by letting himself be baptized, Jesus has identified completely with us human beings. He has given us an example of how we have to behave ourselves when it is about maintaining our relationships with God. In that sense, Jesus has not only assumed the human condition, but he has shared with us the prize of what it means to be human. He has humbled himself to the point of appearing like a sinner while he was without sin.

That is why in his baptism, Jesus teaches us the importance of repentance of sins as a necessary step without which we cannot have a share with him and please his Father. At the same time, whoever lets himself be baptized receives the forgiveness of his sins and the life of the children of God within him.

As it appears to our mind, we cannot spare our effort when it is about making straight our life in ordering it according to the Law of God. Let us, then, on this celebration of the Baptism of our Lord, renew our baptismal vows. May our Lord make us faithful to our baptismal promises! May he give us the courage to change our lives, the determination to reject Satan, and the firm trust to believe in him as he reveals to us as Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

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



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