

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord C - Baptism makes us a New Creation

January 9, 2022.

Today's celebration presents Jesus being baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. The celebration marks the end of the Christmas Season and the beginning of Ordinary Time. This is the beginning of the teaching, preaching and healing public ministry of the Lord. The ancient Christian witnesses see a great significance in this particular "Epiphany" or showing of the Lord. **The words of the Father, the presence of the Holy Spirit demonstrate God's action among his people. Jesus in his human nature has accepted the plan devised by the Father to care for his people.** As The Catechism of the Catholic Church 900 says: ***"Since, like all the faithful, lay Christians are entrusted by God with the apostolate by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, they have the right and duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all men throughout the earth."***

In the gospel, Luke (3:15-16, 21-22) tells us that after Jesus is baptized, the heavens open and God the Father says to him: ***You are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased.*** In the second reading, St Paul says to Titus (one of the first bishops on the island of Crete) (2:11-14, 3:4-7): ***"[God] saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, which he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our saviour."*** He's talking about baptism here. And baptism basically does 3 things. It frees us from Original Sin. Original Sin means that we are born in a state of non-friendship with God. Baptism restores us to that friendship. If we've committed any personal sins and repent of our sins, God forgives us through baptism. We become members of the Catholic Church and are able to receive the other sacraments. This means, **by baptism, we are a new creation. Through our Baptism, we are called to share in the life and mission of Christ. We are "made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ" (Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, n. 31). We are in a new relationship with God.** So what kind of new relationship?

We love new things, new houses, new cars, new clothes. But most of those are simply variations of the same thing. The next version of the iPhone definitely won't be that much different than its predecessors. Cars don't change that much from one year to the next. Clothing styles don't bring a radical newness to our wardrobe from one year to the next. After all, clothes are always clothes. But what if there were a change that rocked our world? What if something happened that brought a newness that changed our lives? Wouldn't we want that? By our baptism, the Father gave us his Son to make us daughters and sons of his own as well as brothers and sisters to one another. **"And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14).** The Father create new names for us too: **"Beloved Son", "Beloved Daughter."** He is really present within our hearts in a new way. We have a new power to live in love, a new power to be the presence of Christ in the world. Baptism makes us a new creation. We are given a new life, and that changes everything. **We are given a new relationship with God that gives new meaning to every moment of our lives.**

There's a story in the Acts of the Apostles that underlines the gift of baptism. In chapter 9, Philip meets an official from Ethiopia visiting Jerusalem and explains a passage from the Bible to him. Philip tells him about Jesus Christ and the new life he came to bring us. This creates a desire for the Ethiopian official to learn more and to enter into this new life by asking Philip to baptize him. He tells Philip, ***Look, there is some water by the side of the road. What s preventing you from baptizing me right now?***, and the Bible tells us that the man went on his way rejoicing. Most of us are baptized as babies, and we don't realize what's

happening. But if we were aware of the tremendous gift we receive, our response would probably be similar to the official's. And who wouldn't rejoice about receiving this friendship with God? Through our own baptism, God is near us. He is part of our story, and we are part of his. We are given new life.

This Sunday's gospel message leads us to **consider God's plan for our new lives and how well we can allow Him to work his plans through us.** Most of us grew up with goals and ideal we wanted in life. Maybe we wanted to go to college and get a great job and then get married and raise a beautiful family. Maybe some of us wanted to enter into a vocational life of service to the Lord and to his people. As time goes on, we all refine our goals. Maybe a person does not just want to become a general practitioner, but a cardiologist. If we were blessed with marriage and then doubly blessed with children, we quickly wanted more in life than just to have a husband, a wife, or a family. For example, when our love became infinitely more than admiration, we were determined to do anything, make any sacrifice for our spouse. When we brought our children home from the hospital, we quickly moved from wanting to have them to wanting to have the very best for them.

This is good. **This is sacrificial love.** Our sacrifice out of love for others, our spouse or our children is itself the very existence of God's love in our home, our domestic church. When you who are married put your spouse before yourselves, you are continuing His Mission to make love the motivation of life. When you who have children empty yourselves so your children can grow into the reflections of God He created them to be, you are continuing His Mission. Sometimes we ask ourselves a question, "Why was I created?" or "What is God's plan for me?" His plan is that you and I make a difference in the world by gifting the world with a unique reflection of his love that only each of us could provide. You and I are not mere numbers in a vast planet of people, or a vast universe of rational creatures. You and I are much more, infinitely more than this. You and I are Christians. We are lovers, Divine Lovers. We love the Divine and the Divine loves us and through us. We exist to love, to love God with our whole mind, heart and soul and to love others as God loves them.

We Christians believe that life, authentic life, consists in serving God by making the presence of Jesus Christ a reality in the lives of others. That is why we embrace the work of the Lord until the last day we live. **That is why each stage of our lives presents us with a challenge, a new way to serve the Lord. We live for the Lord. We die for the Lord. We embrace the mission of the Father. We do this through our vocations to the married life, to parenthood, to the priesthood, to religious life, or to the life of the committed Catholic single.** When we love others, we are continuing His Mission, for He is the Tremendous Lover. When we develop and use the particular gifts He has given to each of us to make the world beautiful for others, we are continuing His Mission. When we strive to be the best at whatever it is that He calls us to do in our lives, we are continuing His Mission. When we say "No!" to sin and "Yes" to care for all who are hurting, we are continuing His Mission. When we make time to be kind to those whom our society hates, the downtrodden, the socially unacceptable, the butt of jokes at school, at work, in the community, we are continuing His Mission. When we respond to the Grace to do something for someone else, we are continuing His Mission. When we realize with our lives that we are not the centre of the universe, but that Jesus is the Centre, and our centre, we are continuing His Mission. **Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us join Jesus at the Jordan River. With Him we also accept the mission the Father has set aside for each one of us. As said before, through our Baptism, we are "made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ"** And we thank God for making us part of His plan for His people. Amen.