

Baptism of the Lord, Parish of St Mary Bradford, January 10, 2021

R 1 Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Psalm 28; R 2 Acts 10:34-38; Gosp Mk 1:7-11

Because most of us were baptized as infants we have little or no recollection of what that experience was, except through stories narrated by our parents or through photographs. Many, like me, may remember the year they were baptized but probably not the exact date. Ideally, the day of our baptism is our proper birthday. We receive a certificate which properly speaking is our birth certificate to new life and a new family. It is when we are born into the family of the people of God. As Pope Francis says, “The day of our Baptism,” “is the point of departure of a journey of conversion that lasts our whole life and which is continually sustained by the Sacrament of Penance.” It is the first of the sacraments of Christian initiation. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains, “Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the spirit and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God: we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission” (CCC 1213). And to show its importance Jesus our sinless savior was baptized in the river Jordan by John the Baptist.

In the gospel of Matthew (3:15), we are told that Jesus accepted John’s baptism in order to fulfill all righteousness. What does this mean? Though Jesus is sinless, he submits to the rite to identify with sinners and align himself with God’s plan. In a homily on Baptism, Pope Benedict XVI asserts that in his baptism Jesus shows his solidarity with us, in our efforts to convert and to be rid of our selfishness, to break away from our sins in order to tell us that if we accept him in our life, he can lift us to God our Father. This solidarity was not merely of the mind and will. He truly immersed himself in our condition. He experienced our pain. He identified with our hunger. He wept with us in our sorrows as we see in the case of the death of his friend Lazarus. Surely St Damian of Molokai was living out this example when he became a leper even as he ministered to lepers. In addition, by agreeing to be baptized by John, Jesus was confessing sin on behalf of the nation as Nehemiah, Ezra, Moses and Daniel did in the past. St Maximus of Turin opines, “Someone might ask, “Why would a holy man desire baptism?” Listen to the answer: Christ is baptized, not to be made holy by the water, but to make the water holy, and by his cleansing to purify the waters which he touched. For when the Saviour is washed, all water for our baptism is made clean, purified at its source for the dispensing of baptismal grace to the people of future ages.” It was also an occasion to inaugurate his public ministry. Our baptism effectively makes us public witnesses for Christ. When we are faithful to our baptismal promises we hear the loving words of the Father- “Here is my beloved son or daughter in whom I am well pleased.” In the baptismal rite we made some renunciations. We renounce Satan and all his works and all his empty promises. This renunciation should become part of our daily commitment as Christians. We are called to stand in radical opposition to the empty works and promises of the evil one, and to believe instead in God the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord.

The symbols of the baptismal rite reminds us in a special way what this sacrament means. We are presented with a candle which is lit from the Paschal Candle. This is the light of Christ which enlightens all humankind and which ought to lead us through the darkness of this life. We are wrapped with a white garment the symbol of purity and admonished to bring our souls unstained

unto eternal life. In our time and day, many people consider baptism as part of our religious/cultural heritage. They baptize their children, but never bring them up in the way of the Lord. They never inspire them by the example of their own Christian life. Parents and god parents have a sacred responsibility to bring up the children entrusted to them in the way of the faith. Let us recall our baptism today and ask God for the grace to remain faithful to the promises we made ourselves or were made on our behalf by our parents and godparents.

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