

The Baptism of the Lord- B 2015

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Acts 10:34-38; Mark 1:7-11

Homilies are vehicles for breaking open the Word of God. First read the Sunday readings at:
<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/011115.cfm>

*On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open
and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him.
And a voice came from the heavens,
“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”*

With that, Jesus’ public ministry commenced.

Although described in only a few sentences, there is something profound going on at the Baptism of our Lord. God is revealing something about himself as the Father, as the Holy Spirit and as the Son.

Ritual immersions in water were not uncommon in first century Palestine. It marked repentance of one’s sinful past and a reorientation towards God.

John proclaimed such a baptism of repentance.

But, Jesus was without sin.

So, if Jesus is without sin, what is going on at his baptism?

While *we* are called to repent, while *our* sins are washed away in baptism, God incarnate, born to a virgin, had no need to repent. Born into this world, Jesus sympathizes with our weaknesses, for he has “*similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin.*” (Heb 4: 15)

Jesus baptism is not about anything for which he had to repent. Jesus’ baptism is a manifestation of who Jesus is.

Our Catechism says:

Our Lord voluntarily submitted himself to the baptism of St. John, intended for sinners, in order to “fulfill all righteousness.”.

Jesus’ gesture is a manifestation of his self-emptying. (Phil 2:7)

The Spirit who had hovered over the waters of the first creation descended then on the Christ as a prelude of the new creation, and the Father revealed Jesus as his “beloved Son”. (CCC 1224)

Jesus’ identity was affirmed. He was empowered and sent on a life mission.ⁱ

Peter preaching in the house of Cornelius said about Jesus’ baptism:

“God anointed Jesus ...with the Holy Spirit and power.

He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil,

for God was with him.” (Acts 10:38)

Following the example of John the Baptizer and Apostolic Tradition we are called to repent. Our identity as sons and daughters is affirmed. We are empowered and sent on a life mission, to herald the Kingdom of God.

While I cannot remember my own baptism as an infant, I embrace the grace received that day in making me a new creation in the sight of God.

While we are indeed cleansed of our sins when we follow Jesus’ example and immerse ourselves into baptism by the Holy Spirit, we more profoundly enter into Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. We enter into his Paschal Mystery, the same mystery we embrace when we come to this altar to receive Him in the Blessed Sacrament.

St. Paul tells us:

Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. (Rm 6:3)

This verse is found in both our Church’s baptism and funeral liturgies. It speaks of entering into Jesus’ Paschal or Passover Mystery, his passing from life through death into life.

This is the Good News we have to share. We share by proclaiming the message. And we share when we accept God’s grace and enter into his Paschal Mystery, our own dying and rising in Christ.

We are immersed into that Paschal Mystery when we receive Baptism. We are immersed into that Mystery when, as disciples, we respond to Jesus’ call for us to love one another as He loved us. (Jn 13:34) Jesus shows us how.

Pope Francis, in his *Joy of the Gospel*, wrote:

Jesus’ whole life, his way of dealing with the poor, his actions, his integrity, his simple daily acts of generosity, and finally his complete self-giving, is precious and reveals the mystery of his divine life.ⁱⁱ

Jesus is our model. He transforms suffering and death into life. We are called to be instruments of the same.

We all experience suffering. We suffer chronic anxiety. We suffer in sickness, pain and injury. We suffer with abandonment and loneliness. We suffer with broken hearts. Since we all suffer, it goes beyond reason how we can so often fail in showing compassion for others’ suffering. But isn’t that so often our way?

When others have been unfair to us, or we have found ourselves victims of injury or injustice, how often have we just passed on the hurt and pain to others? That may be natural to our fallen human nature, but that is not the divine nature for which we were created.

Richard Rohr spoke to this. He wrote:

All great spirituality is about what we do with our pain.

We will either transform our pain or we will transmit it in one form or another.ⁱⁱⁱ

To transform our pain is more than a human can do by oneself. It is by entering into Jesus' Paschal Mystery we are able to be His instruments of healing and hope.

As we die and rise with Christ through his baptism, we are called to act as he acts: do good... champion for the oppressed... allowing God to be with us... and act through us.

It was through baptism, that Jesus was anointed and began his ministry. It is through our own baptism that we are united to Jesus' mission.

May we come hungry to Jesus' altar, to receive and to be nourished, so that we may dare to love like Jesus loves.

ⁱ Robert J. Miller, *Fire in the Deep*, p. 30-31

ⁱⁱ Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, #265

ⁱⁱⁱ Richard Rohr, *On the Threshold of Transformation*