

Homily of the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord Year B, 2021

Isaiah 55:1-11; Psalm: Isaiah 12:2-6; 1 John 5:1-9; Mark 1:7-11

Last Sunday was the Feast of the Epiphany of the Lord. Epiphany means the revelation of Jesus to the world. The revelation continues, today, with the Baptism of Jesus.

As we see in today's Gospel, God himself and the Holy Spirit are the witnesses to Jesus' revelation. God makes a public declaration about Jesus, not through any prophet, not through any angel, not through the shepherds, not through the Magi, not through Simeon and Anna, not through John the Baptist, but by himself and in the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel says, "After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." This declaration by God is the greatest disclosure or revelation of Jesus. St. John urges us in the second reading, "If we accept human testimony, the testimony of God is surely greater. Now he has testified on behalf of his son" (1 John 5:9).

Catholic catechism teaches that Baptism is a Sacrament through which we are cleansed from original sin; we become followers of Christ, children of God, and members of the Church. We may ask, if Baptism cleanses us from original sin, why, then, was it necessary that Jesus was baptized although he was sinless? Maximus of Turin explains, "Christ is baptized, not that he may be sanctified in the waters, but that he himself may sanctify the waters... For when the Savior is washed, then already for our Baptism all water is cleansed and the fount purified... Christ therefore takes the lead in Baptism, so that Christian people may follow after him with confidence."

By his Baptism, Jesus incarnates himself into humanity. He fulfills all requirements of identifying with sinners. According to St. Athanasius, "He became what we are, so that he might make us what he is." We, therefore, become recipients of his incarnation by our own Baptism. Hence, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1272, teaches, "Incorporated into Christ by Baptism, the person baptized is configured to Christ. Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark (character) of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark, even if sin prevents Baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation. Given once for all, Baptism cannot be repeated."

Today's celebration reminds us of the importance of our own Baptism. As mortal beings, we may not achieve the state of purity that the Sacrament of Baptism granted us when we were baptized. However, we are invited to strive to follow after Jesus, strive to be configured to him, in order to become beloved of God and well pleased to him. We can do this by keeping the baptismal promises we made, or that were made on our behalf during our Baptism (for many who were baptized as infants). The baptismal promises are to reject Satan, and all his works, and all his empty promises, and to believe in God, in Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit, and in the Church.

Keeping our baptismal promises helps us to maintain the Christian dignity which the white garment we were clothed during our Baptism signifies. Keeping our baptismal promises helps us to walk as children of the light which the candle that was lit during our Baptism signifies. During Baptism, the minister touches our ears and mouth and prays, "May the Lord soon touch your ears to receive his word, and your mouth to proclaim his faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father." If this prayer bears fruit in us, then we are beloved of God and well pleased to him.

Unfortunately, many Catholics and many Christians fail to understand the spiritual meanings of Baptism. Some take it lightly as a christening, which is a church ceremony of giving a baby a name. This ignorance results to many people's lack of commitment to keeping baptismal promises. Failure in keeping baptismal promises means failure in configuring to Christ, failure in following after him, failure in belonging to him, and failure in pursuing Christian dignity. Therefore, the celebration of the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is an invitation to us to rediscover the importance of our own Baptism to our journey of faith, and to see that our Baptism bears the fruit of salvation. That is the only way we become beloved of God.

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