

Homily of the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord Year C, 2022

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Psalm 29:1-3, 9-10; Acts 10:34-38; Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

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 read 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 all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased'" (Luke 3:21-22).

God's revelation of Jesus was prophesied by Isaiah as we read in the first reading, "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased. Upon him I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations. ... [He is] a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness" (Isaiah 42:1, 6-7). As we begin the second week of the year, we pray with the prophecy of Isaiah that the light of Jesus lights our way and dispels every darkness of the past year. May we be healed from every blindness of the past year. May we be released from every confinement and dungeon of the past year. Amen.

In the second reading, we read, "[Jesus] went about doing good and healing all those possessed by the devil, for God was with him" (Acts 10:38). We pray that in the new year, we will experience Jesus' goodness, healing and deliverance in abundance. Amen.

Catholic catechism teaches that Baptism is a Sacrament through which we are cleansed from original sin. Through Baptism, we become followers of Christ, children of God, and members of the Church. Some people 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 fulfils 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 and baptismal promises. 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.

Today, we are invited to remember the great day we were initiated into the membership of the Church and christened as followers of Christ. We are invited to rediscover the importance of our Baptism to our journey of faith; and as we begin the new year, renew our baptismal promises, and make effort in keeping them. By this, we become God's beloved children and pleasing to him.

Baptism is not a Christian naming ceremony as some people wrongly describe it. It is the spiritual and mystical foundation of other Sacraments and our spiritual life. It is the beginning of our Christian dignity. If the baptismal foundation is absent, there is nothing spiritually to build on. If the baptismal foundation becomes weak at any stage, the spiritual building becomes weak and collapses if not reconstructed or restored. We are configured (shaped) to Christ by our Baptism. We are dis-configured (dis-shaped) from Christ when we fail to keep our baptismal promises.

Today, too, we call to mind and pray for the church or parish where we were baptized, the priest who baptized us, our godparents, and all those who assisted in our Baptism. They all played indispensable roles at the beginning of our journey of faith. Since we do not have the tradition of celebrating Baptism-day, today is a good day to celebrate our Baptism-day.

An old Igbo hymn comes to mind:

Nyelu m aka, O Maria; nyelu m aka, O Maria; nyelu m aka, O Maria;
Ka m wee lota ife m kwelu na-nkwa.
Help me, O Mary; help me, O Mary; help me, O Mary;
That I may remember my promises.
Amen.

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