

Homily of the Feast Baptism of the Lord

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 the Gospel, God himself and the Holy Spirit are the witnesses of the revelation. God makes a public pronouncement 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 that after Jesus had been baptized, and he was praying, the heaven opened “and the Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” This is the greatest disclosure or revelation of Jesus, and it happened during his Baptism.

We have the following questions and answers in Catholic Catechism:

Question: What is Baptism?

Answer: Baptism is a Sacrament which cleanses us from original sin, makes us Christians, children of God, and members of the Church.

Question: Does Baptism also forgives actual sins?

Answer: Baptism also forgives actual sins, with all punishment due to them, when it is received in proper disposition by those who have been guilty of actual sin.

Explanation: Actual sin is personal sin, either mortal or venial. The act of committing a mortal sin destroys charity, that is the grace in the heart of a Christian. It is in itself a rejection of God (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1855).

The above questions, answers and explanation raise the question, “Why, then, was it necessary that Jesus was baptized although he was sinless?” John the Baptist and Jesus had the following conversation in Matthew 3:13-15, “Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. John tried to prevent him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?’ Jesus said to him in reply, ‘Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed him.”

By his Baptism Jesus incarnates himself into humanity. He fulfills all requirements (righteousness) by identifying with sinners. According to 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.”

Maximus of Turin explains, “Christ is baptized not that he may be sanctified in the waters, but that he himself may sanctify the waters, and by so doing purify all waters of baptism. In the consecration of Christ, the waters of baptism are consecrated.”

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 become beloved of God and well pleased to him, as Jesus was. We can do this by keeping the baptismal promises made during our Baptism: to reject Satan and all his works and all his empty promises, to believe in God, in Jesus, 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 help us to walk as children of the light which the candle light 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.

Indeed, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord invites us to reflect whether our own Baptism is bearing fruits of salvation or not, and whether we are beloved of God and well pleasing to him or not? The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord invites us to repentance.

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