

Homily of the Feast Baptism of the Lord Year A

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 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, "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.'" I consider this pronouncement by God himself the greatest disclosure or revelation of Jesus.

God's pronouncement confirms the prophecy of Isaiah about Jesus in the first reading, "I, the Lord, have called you for justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as 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." As we begin the new year, may Jesus, the light to the nations, light our ways and dispel every darkness. May he heal us from every form of spiritual blindness. And may he release us from every confinement and every dungeon. Amen.

The second reading continues the revelation of Jesus, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him." In the new year, may we experience Jesus' mighty deeds, may we experience his miraculous healings, and his deliverances from the oppression of the Evil One. Amen.

The 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. 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, and by his own purification may purify those streams which he touches... 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 peoples may follow after him with confidence."

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 we made, or that was made on our behalf 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. Baptismal promises are made on our behalf by our parents and godparents when we are baptized as children.

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 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.

Unfortunately, many Catholics and many Christians do not understand the spiritual meanings of Baptism. They take it lightly as a "church ceremony of giving a baby a name." This ignorance results to many people's lack of commitment to the practice of Christian faith. Therefore, the celebration of the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is an invitation to rediscover the importance of our Baptism to our journey of faith and to see that our Baptism bears the fruit of salvation and that we are beloved of God.

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