**Baptism of the Lord – Cycle C**

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

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One of the joys of being a deacon is baptizing infants and children. It is one of the sacramental ministries deacons are ordained to perform, along with weddings and funerals, preaching at Mass and presiding at Holy Hours, and taking Communion to the sick and dying. I have been thrilled to be able to baptize several children from this parish, and I have baptized both of my grandchildren since I have been ordained. Deacon Gerry and I are always ready and willing to serve you in these ways; all you need to do is ask us.

The Solemnity of the Baptism of the Lord gives us the opportunity to reflect on baptism in our own lives and in the life of the Lord Jesus, and the opportunity to understand more fully who we are as Catholics.

We hear today that Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River by his cousin, John. Why did Jesus do this? Why would he ask to be baptized?

Jesus was baptized not because he had any sin, not because he needed to be cleansed from anything, not because he had to *become* God’s Son through baptism because he always was the Son of God, he always beheld his Father face to face and did so continually from all eternity even during his time here on earth.

No, Jesus was baptized for other reasons.

First, he was baptized to provide us the way and the means by which we would be able to make it safely back to our heavenly home.

Jesus was baptized to show us clearly the need for the sacrament of baptism if we are to hear God say to us, “You are my beloved son or *daughter”* and if we are to be saved from sin. Jesus was baptized to sanctify water which would be used for baptism. When Jesus entered the water of the Jordan River he established, if you will, that running water, flowing water, would be used in baptism and that the water would be filled with the Holy Spirit who would be given to the baptized person. That is why even today, in the sacrament of baptism, only water can be used and *it must flow.* It must flow over the person’s head or body when the words, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” are said. Just as the river water flowed over Jesus in his baptism, so too the water of the font flows over the person baptized today.

Baptism is so important that the Church teaches that parents have an obligation to have their children baptized soon after their birth.

There is a second reason why Jesus was baptized. He was baptized to give us an example to follow and to reveal to us who he is and who we are to become through baptism.

Do you remember the Old Testament account of how the Hebrew people, fleeing Egypt, came to the Red Sea and how God appeared to them as fire and led them through the Red Sea to safety, but had the water drown out all the Egyptians after the Hebrews had been delivered? The ancient Fathers of the Church saw in this account the foreshadowing of baptism. God led his people into the water. He went first, and they followed and saved. So, too, Jesus went first into the waters of baptism to reveal to us that he is, in fact, God who brings us to safety, and that he as a man water would flow.

Jesus is God and Man, the Son of God and Son of Mary and eternally one God with the Father and the Holy Spirit, just as he became one with us in our human nature. He is a divine person, and is both human and divine in natures. Jesus is the favored one of the Father. He has become like us in every way but sin.

As Christians know that we are called to be Jesus’ presence in today’s world and because of this Isaiah’s words in our first reading today apply to us too.

So, Isaiah said that God has grasped you by the hand and called you to be victorious in practicing justice in all you do. Do you believe this?

Do you believe, as Isaiah said, that God formed you and gave you life so that others may see the Truth, who is Jesus, so that others may be released from all that binds them – poverty, hunger, ignorance, depression and anxiety, violence and death?

In our second reading, Peter reinforced this saying that any man on any nation, if he acts with justice, is acceptable to the Lord. In other words, all of us who have been baptized and confirmed in our faith must live justly with all other men and women – feeding the hungry, comforting the sorrowing, teaching the ignorant, burying the dead, and sheltering the homeless.

Just as God the Father, speaking from heaven, said to his Son Jesus, who had just been baptized by John, *“You are my beloved Son. With you I am well-pleased!”* so too he says of us, his adopted sons and daughters through baptism.

We are beloved sons and daughters of God! Do you believe this?

We are to love others as God first love us. Do you believe that?

“That is a nice thought, but I’m not sure of it” you might be thinking, There is a part of us which really doesn’t want to fully accept this idea that we are sons and daughters of God because if we do accept it, then we have to live like Jesus lived. It is our tendency to fall into a false humility here by saying, “I am only a man or a woman, without any real understanding of religious matters. I leave all that up to people holier than me.” If we do this we put ourselves into a weird sort of dilemma because on the one hand we blind ourselves to our real dignity as sons and daughters of God, and on the other hand we blind ourselves to our real sins, all those sins of omission, those times when we didn’t speak the truth or didn’t shelter the homeless or feed the hungry or accept foreigners, and instead focused on trivial matters.

No my friends, you are baptized into Christ Jesus, into his life, his death, and his resurrection. By your baptism, you become temples of the Holy Spirit. You become a brother or sister of Jesus, His life is now to be your life.

It is through baptism that we are conformed to Christ, we are spiritually adopted as sons and daughters of God, we are cleansed from every stain of sin, we are given the Holy Spirit and made temples of that Spirit, we pledge our lives to Jesus so that we might become the eyes and ears, the hands and the feet, and the voice of Jesus in today’s world. It is through baptism that we have opened to us the door for receiving the other sacraments, and we are made members of the Catholic Church.

Let us now open ourselves, once again, as we did when we were infants, to the graces given to us by this wonderful sacrament, and let us never be ashamed to follow him who has called us to the wonderful life in God.