**The Baptism of the Lord – Cycle B, 2015**

Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7; Acts 10: 34-38; Mark 1: 7-11

January 10/11, 2015

Do you ever wonder why it is so important to be baptized, so important that Jesus both said as much with his words and did as much by his actions? After all, today we hear that Jesus himself was baptized in the Jordan River by John.

Of course the answer we all know is that baptism erases original sin from our lives, restores us to friendship with God, gives us grace, and makes us sons and daughters of God and members of his Church. That is very important, and a great gift given to us by God, an immeasurable gift that opens the door of salvation to us. This is perhaps the most important personal reason for us.

But Jesus had no need of forgiveness of sins and he had no need to become a son of God for he was from all eternity the Son of God, and he had no need of salvation for he was salvation. By being baptized by John Jesus was showing us something important and it is this: We are called to be signs of justice and peace.

By the grace of our baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit we are to be a sign of difference, examples of peace in a world torn by war and terrorism, a people of justice in the presence of poverty and prejudice, a people who stand for life in the culture of death. We are to stand strong and tall and be a witness, a sign from which Satan himself will flee. This is the other reason why baptism is so necessary for all of us, for in that sacrament we are given that power and that responsibility.

When we are baptized and made right with God and the world, when God infuses his Holy Spirit and his grace into our very beings, at that moment God calls us to freedom, to light, to justice, to a covenant with him, to a holy relationship which he establishes in our lives! God said of his Son Jesus and he says to us: *Here is my servant whom I uphold!* *Upon whom I have put my spirit!* *I have formed you to be a covenant to others,* *to bring light to all peoples*, *to bring freedom to the poor!* This is the great Christian reality that we all too often forget, and in our forgetting we treat ourselves and others poorly.

God has anointed us with his Holy Spirit at baptism. Even the Old Testament prophets, as we heard today in our first reading, attest to this anointing, this baptism we all must receive. Jesus himself, today in the Gospel, shows us the way by being baptized in the Jordan.

O, the glory of God breaks through the gloom and darkness of injustice each and every time a person is baptized, just as the heavens opened at Jesus’ baptism. The Spirit descends and the Father proclaims to each and every person at the moment of their baptism: *You are my beloved son (or daughter)!* *I am well pleased!*

Although we see and hear it not, the heavens indeed open and the Spirit descends, and the Father makes his proclamation. Yes, the miracle of divine sonship is extended to everyone at their baptism, just as Jesus’ divinity and sonship was made evident at his. God himself was heard that day at the Jordan, but a miracle no less is performed at our baptisms when the deacon pours the water on the head and says these words: *I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son* *and of the Holy Spirit.*

God himself welcomes you into his divine family. You are completely flooded with divine grace, with God’s life and love, and the Holy Spirit enters you and you become a completely different person in God’s eyes. He sees the beauty of the change, even though we may be blinded by it. The old person is gone; only the new remains. The old is stripped away.

It is as if God the Father lifts you up, caresses you, and forms you into something very beautiful, very pure, and very innocent. It is as if he sets you up as a light to the nations, and a sign of justice and freedom to those locked in sin and darkness. He sets you up as a shining example for all to see.

Such is our baptismal dignity. With such a dignity, I ask you how can we then do violence to one another, act unjustly toward one another, if we truly believe that we all have been baptized as brothers and sisters in the family of God, sons and daughters of God, and that the power and authority to proclaim peace and establish justice is poured into us at baptism? How can we blindly violate one another, we who have been inundated by the grace of God, anointed by his Spirit and consecrated to him and to each other? There is so much violence in our world, in our families, in our communities, even within us.

There is a scene in the movie *Ben Hur* in which Judah Ben Hur is chained to a long line of convicts and marched across the desert. He is dying of thirst. They enter a small village called Nazareth and a man by the name of Jesus tries to give him a drink of water. A centurion kicks the water away from Judah before he can drink, saying, “No water for this man!” Jesus, without saying a word and without lifting a threatening hand, simply stands tall and stares at the centurion in the eye. The centurion is frozen, unable to continue his injustice and sin. Jesus defeated him by his silent witness.

Do you believe that by virtue of your baptism, by the grace you have received and the Holy Spirit who has come down upon you that you too, like Jesus, can stand tall when faced with injustice and war and subdue it? Will you do what Jesus did? Will you stand down injustice when you see it?