

Baptism of the Lord

Is. 55: 1-11; 1 Jn. 5: 1-9; Mk. 1: 7-11

Unless you were baptized as an adult, you have no memory of your Baptism. Even the Sacrament of Confirmation may be only a hazy memory from the time before you entered high school. But the importance of these Sacraments cannot be overstated. It is not too much to say that these Sacraments set the course for our entire lives.

This Sunday, we celebrate the Baptism of our Lord, Jesus Christ. One might wonder why the Son of God needed to be baptized. What was the significance of that? It was the fulfilment of the will of God that Jesus come into the world and live as a human person. John the Baptist was baptizing in the River Jordan and Jesus obediently came forward for Baptism as well.

We read that when Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him. Water and the Spirit. Isn't this what happened to us during our Baptism? In performing the Baptism, the priest said these words as he poured water on our heads three times: *I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.* Water and the Spirit.

This wonderful Sacrament is free for the taking. As the prophet, Isaiah prophesied in the First Reading: 'Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.' It is amazing that some parents choose not to have their children baptized 'until they can make their own decision as adults'. It is like not feeding children nutritious food until they are old enough to decide for themselves.

Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of His public ministry in accordance with the will of the Father and in fulfilment of ancient prophesies. Later in the first chapter of Mark's Gospel, we read about Jesus performing healings and expelling demons. After He was baptized, He went out to fulfil the mission given to Him by the Father.

And this is a key feature of Christianity; receiving graces from the Sacraments and then going out to share those graces, to use those gifts to love God by serving others. When we are baptized and, later, when we are confirmed, we receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit: Wisdom, Knowledge, Understanding, Piety, Counsel, Fortitude, and Fear of the Lord. We are meant to go out and use these gifts in the service of mankind. We are not meant to hoard these graces for ourselves. We must go out and share the gifts we have received. That is why, at the end of Mass, we are told to 'Go forth!' You have encountered Christ in the Holy Eucharist, now get out into the street and share the Good News! Go out and love God by serving your neighbour!

When Jesus came up out of the water, God said: 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.' Although we may not have heard these words when we were baptized, there is no doubt that God looked at us then and was very pleased. Since that time, we have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. However, if we continue to use the graces that we received at our Baptism, always striving to fulfil the mission given to us by God, we have faith that we can restore our standing in God's eyes so that when we stand before Him, we will hear those wonderful words: 'Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master'.