

## THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD, JANUARY 10, 2021

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The feast of the Lord's Baptism today officially marks the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of the ordinary time in the Church's calendar. It occurs on the first Sunday after the Epiphany of the Lord. This feast reminds us of the sacrament of Baptism "which cleanses us from original sin, makes us Christians, children of God and members of the Church." The Catechism describes it as "the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word" (CCC, 1213).

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is God himself, did not need Baptism since he had no stain of original nor actual sin in Him. Even when John tried to avoid baptizing him, arguing it should be the other way, Jesus answered that it should be so for now, "for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). Therefore, it foreshadows the importance of our Baptism, which frees us from the darkness of sin and brings us into the eternal life of Christ.

Our first reading today (Isaiah 55:1-11), is the conclusion of the section of Isaiah's Prophecy known as *Deutero-Isaiah* (Second Isaiah) or the Book of Comfort (Isaiah 40-55). The prophet was writing to offer hope and comfort to the exiled people in Babylon. He encouraged them not to lose hope for their exile was coming to an end. He reminded them that God, who punished them with the downfall they were experiencing, was now eager to restore them to life again. Therefore, the people are to partake of the blessings of the messianic salvation by coming to seek the Lord. They were to let go of their old ways of life and instead accept the Lord's way of blessing through obedience to His voice.

In verses 1-5, the Lord invites his suffering people to Him: to those who are thirsty, hungry and have no money, he says, "come to the waters..., come, buy, and eat..., come, buy wine and milk." He then adds an explanation for the symbolism of the water, food, and drinks, saying, to delight yourself in rich food and that your soul may live, "listen diligently to me..., and incline your ear and come to me." Therefore, the invitation to physical food and drink is symbolic of the nourishment of the soul gained by those who come to God and listen to His Words.

In verses 6-7, the Lord becomes more practical saying, "Seek the Lord... call upon him..., let the wicked forsake his way, the unrighteous his thoughts, let him return to the Lord, for he will abundantly forgive. God seeks his people's salvation; He wishes to forgive them and restore their hope in him. They only need to respond by turning from evil and seek Him. The Lord then promises to fulfil for them, his everlasting covenant of love promised to David in 2 Sam 7:12-16, that he will establish his dynasty, kingdom, and throne forever. The Lord was ready to restore their past glory.

The Lord invites his people, to become invested in the thoughts and ways of God as He says, "***my thoughts are not your thoughts and my ways are not your ways.***" We know that the thoughts and ways of the Lord never change whereas because of our propensity for sin, our thoughts and ways change and are impure. Hence, the thoughts and ways of the Lord which are far from that of humans as the heavens are from the earth is sure of fulfilment as the rain waters the earth to make it fertile and fruitful.

The second reading today (1 John 5:1-9) is part of the Johannine corpus (i.e., *the Gospel of St. John, the Three Epistles of John, and the Revelation of St. John*). It is a body of literature that is characteristic of its exhortative and persuasive approach to emphasize the two natures of Christ – divine and human, so that, confessing Jesus as come in the flesh is the real demonstration of a spirit that comes from God.

In the first letter of John today, the author emphasizes that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God who came not by water only, but by water and blood. Coming by water and Spirit refers to Jesus' divine origin while coming by blood refers to his humanity and his being born of flesh. The two natures are thereby acknowledged and accepted. Therefore, John invites Christians to be witnesses of Jesus in the world. He admitted that those who bear witness

to Christ are born of God. Consequently, he reminds us that to love God is to keep his commandments, echoing the first reading's invitation to return to God. When we do this, we gain faith to overcome the world.

In the Gospel reading today (Mark 1:7-11), John the Baptist announced that the Christ who is greater than he and is unworthy to untie his sandal lace would baptize with the Holy Spirit. At the end of Jesus' Baptism at the Jordan, the heavens opened, the Spirit descended upon him like a dove, and the voice of the father announced from the heavens "you are my beloved Son with you I am well pleased." The father declared his love publicly for His Son, who has taken up the mission of saving the world as the Spirit identified him to the world. Jesus presents a symbolic example of the need to be born again, to be cleansed through the sacrament of Baptism. Through the immersion into water, we die to sin and the world, to be raised into a new life in Christ Jesus.

As Baptism leads us into a new life in Christ Jesus, we are invited to be immersed in the love of God. By coming into the life of God, our sins are forgiven, and our faith nourished. In a world where distractions and provocations surround us, let us constantly seek the Lord, who is revealed to us. Let us be faithful to his commandments by following in his ways and thoughts so that he will fulfil his eternal promises of love in our lives.

Happy Sunday to you. Happy feast of the Baptism of the Lord to you all.