

HOMILY FOR THE FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today we are celebrating the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. This feast recalls the episode narrated in the Gospel in which it is said that one day “Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.”

John the Baptist had withdrawn to the banks of the Jordan, and there he baptized the people who came to him. John the Baptist called people to repentance and to a change of life; this rite of baptism was a rite of purification, an affirmation on the part of the people that they were sorry for their sins and wanted to live a clean life, a life according to the ways of God.

In the Gospel it is said that John did not want to baptize Jesus, insisting that he, John, should instead be baptized by Jesus, but the Master answered him: “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” And John baptized Jesus.

John the Baptist understood who Jesus was and therefore said that he was unworthy to baptize Him. After all, should the servant baptize the Lord? But Jesus did not come affirming His power or His lordship, but rather assuming the condition of a servant, being amongst sinners, in order to be a path of purification, a path to the Father. And thus in Him was fulfilled what the prophecy heard in the first reading had announced:

“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law.”

Jesus presents Himself as this Servant spoken of by the prophet Isaiah. He came as the Servant of the Lord to bring justice to the nations, to proclaim good news to the poor, to bring out the prisoners from confinement and from the dungeon those who dwell in darkness.

And the Gospel also says: “And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.’”

The Father, through the Holy Spirit, bears witness to the Son. He proclaims that Jesus is His Son whom He sent to us to proclaim the Good News to the nations.

This is what Saint Peter recalls in the second reading. Peter opened his mouth and said:

“Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.”

What lessons can we draw from the celebration of the Baptism of Jesus?

That Jesus wanted to make Himself one of us; He came to us identifying Himself with us, mingling with sinners, to show that God shows no partiality, but loves everyone, wants to save everyone, and wants to give His love to all.

That Jesus is the Son of God whom we must listen to, follow, believe in, and love.

To remember that we too, in our baptism, became children of God in Jesus Christ; the Holy Spirit also came upon us. Therefore, we must live as children of God and members of the Body of Christ, which is the Church. In the Church we were baptized, purified from sin, and made members of the new People of God, born not of flesh nor of blood, but of the Spirit. Let us ask ourselves: How do I live my baptism? How do I seek to be a child of God? Do I listen to the Word of Christ and allow it to guide my life?

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Jesus received Baptism and was anointed with the power of the Spirit; afterwards, He “went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil.” At every step of the journey He made, He distributed, through concrete actions, goodness, mercy, forgiveness, solidarity, and love. We Christians, who “believe” in Jesus, who commit ourselves to Him and follow Him, do we take on this “program”? We who were baptized and anointed with the power of the Spirit, do we also bear witness, through concrete actions, to the goodness, mercy, forgiveness, and love of God for humanity? Do we strive to free all those who are oppressed by the devil of selfishness, injustice, exploitation, exclusion, loneliness, illness, illiteracy, and suffering? Do we go out to meet our brothers and sisters, bringing them the love of Jesus Christ?

May the feast of the Baptism of the Lord help us to reflect on our own baptism, striving to live truly as children of God, always having Jesus Christ as our reference, our guide, and our light.

AMEN.