



The Holy See

FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD
MASS AND ADMINISTRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

Sistine Chapel

Sunday, 13 January 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The joy that flowed from the celebration of holy Christmas is fulfilled today in the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. A further reason for jubilation comes to us who are gathered here: indeed, in the sacrament of Baptism that I shall shortly administer to these newborn babies is expressed the living and active presence of the Holy Spirit who, enriching the Church with new children, vitalizes and develops her, and we cannot but rejoice in this. I would like to address a special greeting to you, dear parents and godparents who are witnessing to your faith today by asking for baptism for these children, so that they may be born to new life in Christ and become part of the community of believers.

The Gospel account of the baptism of Jesus which we heard in St Luke's version shows the life of meekness and humility that the Son of God chose freely, complying with the Father's plan to be obedient to his desire for love for man in all things, even to his sacrifice on the cross.

Having reached adulthood, Jesus began his public ministry by going to the River Jordan to receive from John a baptism of penance and conversion. What might seem paradoxical in our eyes actually happened. Did Jesus need penance and conversion? Of course not. Yet the One who is without sin put himself among sinners to have himself baptized, to make this act of penance. The Holy One of God joined those who recognized they were in need of forgiveness and asked God for the gift of conversion, that is, the grace to return to him with their whole heart, to belong totally to him. Jesus chose to join the ranks of sinners, to be in solidarity with them, expressing God's

closeness.

Jesus shows his solidarity with us, with our efforts to convert and to be rid of our selfishness, to break away from our sins in order to tell us that if we accept him in our life he can uplift us and lead us to the heights of God the Father. And Jesus' solidarity is not, as it were, a mere exercise of mind and will. Jesus truly immersed himself in our human condition, lived it to the end, in all things save sin, and was able to understand our weakness and frailty. For this reason he was moved to compassion, he chose to "suffer with" men and women, to become a penitent with us. This is God's work which Jesus wanted to carry out: the divine mission to heal those who are wounded and give medicine to the sick, to take upon himself the sin of the world.

What happened at the moment when Jesus had himself baptized by John? In the face of this act of humble love by the Son of God, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit showed himself in the form of a dove, while a voice from on high expressed the pleasure of the Father who acknowledged his Only- Begotten, his beloved Son. This was a real manifestation of the Blessed Trinity, that bears witness to the divinity of Jesus, of his being the promised Messiah, the One whom God sent to set his People free in order to save them (cf. Is 40:2).

In this way the prophecy of Isaiah that we heard in the first reading came true: the Lord God comes with might to destroy the work of sin and his arm rules in order to disarm the Evil One. However, let us bear in mind that this arm is the arm stretched out on the cross and that Christ's power is the power of the One who suffered for us; this is the power of God, different from the power of the world; thus God comes with power to destroy sin.

Indeed Jesus acted as the Good Shepherd who tended his sheep and gathered his flock, so that none might stray (cf. Is 40:10-11), and layed down his life so that it might have life. It is through his redeeming death that man is liberated from the dominion of sin and reconciled with the Father; it is through his resurrection that man is saved from eternal death and enabled to triumph over the Evil One

Dear brothers and sisters, what happens in the baptism that I shall shortly be administering to your children? Exactly this: they will be deeply united with Jesus for ever, immersed in the mystery of his power, of his might, namely, in the mystery of his death which is a source of life so as to share in his resurrection, to be reborn to new life. This is the miracle that is repeated today, also for your children: in receiving baptism they are reborn as children of God who share in the filial relationship that Jesus has with the Father, in other words who can address God, calling him with full confidence and trust: "Abba, Father". The heavens are also opened above your children and God says: these are my children, children in whom I am well pleased. Inserted into this relationship and liberated from original sin, they become living members of the one body that is the Church and are enabled to live their vocation to holiness in fullness, so as to be able to inherit eternal life, obtained for us by Jesus' Resurrection.

Dear parents, in asking for Baptism for your children you express and witness to your faith, to the joy of being Christian and of belonging to the Church. It is the joy that comes from knowing you have received a great gift from God, faith itself, a gift which not one of us has been able to deserve but which was freely given to us and to which we responded with our “yes”. It is the joy of recognizing that we are children of God, of discovering that we have been entrusted to his hands, of feeling welcomed in a loving embrace in the same way that a mother holds and embraces her child. This joy, which guides every Christian’s journey, is based on a personal relationship with Jesus, a relationship that directs the whole of human existence.

Indeed it is he who is the meaning of our life, the One on whom it is worth keeping our eyes fixed so as to be illuminated by his Truth and to be able to live to the full. The journey of faith that begins for these infants today is therefore based on a certainty, on the experience that there is nothing greater than knowing Christ and communicating friendship with him to others; only in this friendship is the enormous potential of the human condition truly revealed and we can experience what is beautiful and sets us free (cf. *Homily at Holy Mass for the Inauguration of the Pontificate*, 24 April 2005). Whoever has had this experience is not prepared to give up his faith for anything in the world.

Dear godparents, it is your important duty to sustain and help the parents in their educational task, supporting them in the transmission of the truths of the faith and in their witness to the Gospel values and bringing up these children in an ever deeper friendship with the Lord. May you always be able to offer them your good example, through the practice of the Christian virtues. It is not easy to express what one believes in openly and without compromises. This is especially true in the context in which we live, in the face of a society that all too often considers those who live by faith in Jesus as out of fashion and out of time.

On the crest of this mentality, Christians too can risk seeing the relationship with Jesus as restrictive, something that humiliates one’s fulfilment; “God is constantly regarded as a limitation placed on our freedom, that must be set aside if man is ever to be completely himself” (*The Infancy Narratives: Jesus of Nazareth*)

But this is not how it is! This vision shows that it has not understood the relationship with God at all, for as we gradually proceed on our journey of faith, we realize that Jesus exercises on us the liberating action of God’s love which brings us out of our selfishness, our withdrawal into ourselves, to lead us to a full life in communion with God and open to others.

“‘God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him’ (1 Jn 4:16). These words from the First Letter of John express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith: the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny” (Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, n. 1).

The water which will sign these children in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit will immerse them in that “fount” of life which is God himself and will make them his own true sons. And the seed of the theological virtues, faith, hope and charity, sown by God, seeds that are planted in their hearts today through the power of the Holy Spirit, must always be nourished by the word of God and by the sacraments so that these Christian virtues may grow and attain full maturity, until they make each one of them a true witness of the Lord.

As we invoke upon these little ones the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, let us entrust them to the protection of the Blessed Virgin; may she always preserve them with her motherly presence and accompany them at every moment of their lives. Amen.

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