

Beloved in Christ, the feast of baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ ends the Christmas season and also serves as a bridge into Ordinary Time. Today we celebrate the Lord's baptism by John in the Jordan. Luke relates Jesus' baptism as another epiphany (manifestation), declaring that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God. We celebrate not only Jesus' baptism, but we celebrate God's gracious coming among us in this very human way. We celebrate the baptism of ourselves. The covenant of love extended from Father to Son and to all children of God. In this way, every baptized and confirmed believer become "beloved sons and beloved daughters of God". This is why today is a great celebration. It's the beginning of something new. It's the beginning of a new hope. It's the beginning of a new faith. It is a feast with a very deep meaning because it helps us to answer three basic questions in our faith: what is baptism? Did Jesus need baptism? What is our response to baptism?

Baptism is a sacrament that cleanses us from original sins and personal sins, it makes us children of God. Baptism imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual sign or character, which consecrates the baptized person ... Because of this character, baptism cannot be repeated (cf. DS1609, 1624 and CCC1280). The definition of baptism clearly shows that Jesus does not need baptism, since he had no sin. One reason given is that God wanted Jesus to begin his ministry (mission) by symbolically identifying himself with sinful humanity in order to save it. Jesus therefore, identified with humanity not as a sinner, but as a fellow human being.

John the Baptist tried to stop Jesus and said, "I cannot baptize you." Why? Because the Messiah is the Son of God and without sin. This explains why John the Baptist objected to Jesus' request for baptism in the Gospel of Matthew, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?" (Matt 3:14). The answer Jesus gave John helps us to understand why Jesus wanted to be baptized, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matt 3:15) "To fulfill everything laid down by God." Jesus comes to receive John's baptism and hence recognizes it as a stage in salvation. Again, the Baptism of the Lord makes a quick transition from Jesus' childhood to his adult public ministry and Luke's account begins with "a feeling of expectancy" that had arisen among the people (Lk.3:15). What they are "expecting" of course is appearance of the long-promised Messiah. They wonder whether John the Baptist might be the Messiah.

In the opinion of Luke, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the context of prayer (v. 21). Prayer is a notable theme in Luke. Jesus prays at significant moments in his ministry (6:12; 9:18; 9:28; 22:40-46; 23:34, 46). Prayer erases the barrier between heaven and earth. While Jesus is praying, the "heavens were opened", and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. A voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Lk.3:21-22). Luke's account of baptism is very short, but very profound. Luke shows us that God has anointed Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, to go out and heal and save the world. The baptism in River Jordan contains a deep theology significance because Jordan River is a sacred river in which Israelite crossed to the Promise Land, the land of milk and honey, and so it is appropriate place for John the Baptist to introduce the Redeemer of the New Covenant.

Finally, dear friend, Christian baptism has two principal effects, namely: the purification from sin and the new birth in the Spirit. Baptism indeed makes us a new creation (2 Cor.5:17). We are incorporated into Christ and become adopted children of God. Let us pray in this Mass to maintain our baptismal innocence each and every day in our lives. The way to keep on growing more as loving children of God is through prayer. It was while Jesus was praying that the Holy Spirit came upon him. Let us do our best to be active in prayer and build that intimacy with God so that He will continue to pour His blessings on us, so that we will grow from grace to grace. Amen!