

The Baptism of the Lord

(Is 55:1-11/ 1Jn 5:1-9/ Mk1:7-11)

Today is the first Sunday of ordinary time, year B. It is also the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. This feast marks the definitive end of Christmas season and the formal beginning of ordinary time. Last Wednesday morning we took down all the Christmas lights, and put away the Christmas tree, the nativity scene, and the poinsettia flowers in the storage room.

After Jesus had prayed and fasted in the desert for forty days, he went to the place where Saint John the Baptist was baptizing people in the Jordan river and Jesus was baptized by John. Through the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, the Church reminds us that Jesus was baptized with water and the Holy Spirit to bring healing and salvation to all nations. In a special way, this is a reminder of our own baptisms and the importance of the sacrament of baptism in our lives as Christians.

Most of us here, if not all, have been baptized. Many of you were baptized in this church here, or your children and grand children. Most of us do not remember our baptism. We don't remember most of the things that happened to us in our earliest year. When we were infants and our parents took us to the church to be baptized, to be received the Holy Spirit, and to be received into the Church. It is the most important day of our lives when we were baptized because it liberated us from original sin and joined us to Jesus forever. Also on that day we were beginning a very special relationship with God and we became a member of Jesus' family, the Catholic Church.

Or some of us were older and prepared through study for baptism. It is beneficial to renew our understandings of just what baptism is all about, what effects take place. So Baptism is a sacrament where a person receives God's grace and is welcomed into the church.

In today's first reading from the book of Isaiah, God extends a universal invitation to all of us. It is a special invitation to come to Christ the living water. Christ is the living water in whose name we were baptized. Through his baptism, He has sanctified our water of baptism.

When we are celebrating Baptism of the Lord, we talk again about John the Baptist and about the Baptism of Jesus. We know that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Most of the people who came to him were repentant sinners. However, Jesus did not need forgiveness since he was sinless. He was human like us in all things except he was without sin. So Jesus had no need for baptism for repentance. Moreover, Jesus didn't really need to be baptized because he is God; he is already filled with the Holy Spirit and God's love.

It's hard for us to understand why Jesus, the sinless one, God's Son, came to John for a baptism of repentance. Even John the Baptist had difficulty understanding why Jesus came to him for baptism. As John said to Jesus, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?" But Jesus said to John in reply, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matt 3:15). The answer Jesus gave John helps us to understand why Jesus wanted to be baptized. "To fulfill all righteousness" is why Jesus wanted to be baptized. He came to John to be baptized to set an example for us by showing his humanity. He showed us the necessity of baptism in the lives of each of us.

Right after Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan by John, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form a dove. And a voice came from the heavens saying, "You are my beloved Son; with I am well pleased." God proclaimed that Jesus is Son of God. These words bring such joy. At his baptism, Christ was anointed with the Holy Spirit. This prepared and empowered Him for his earthly mission of bringing healing and peace to all nations. It was necessary for Christ to be baptized in order to highlight the importance of the sacrament of baptism as the foundation for other sacraments. We are told of this event in the Holy Bible in order that we may know that it is through the Sacrament of Baptism that the Holy Spirit descends upon us in order to transform us into new creations as children of God. Then, He begins the purifying process that sanctifies us to become in the likeness of Jesus.

Brothers and Sisters,

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord brings the end of Christmas season, but more importantly, it is a new beginning. Let this beginning in the life of Christ be a new beginning in our Christian life. Be renewed in the baptismal waters to publicly, actively, fervently be Christ in our world today. As we celebrate the baptism of Jesus and reflect on its significance, let us also remember the graces we have received in our own baptism, and renew and deepen our baptismal commitment. May our Lord make us faithful to our baptismal promises, so that we will live faithfully our baptismal promises throughout our lives.