

The Baptism of the Lord (Year B)

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On Sunday after the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, and Christmas Season liturgically ends on this day. In all four Gospels, the baptism of Jesus is described as the first event in His public ministry. Jesus went down from Nazareth to the Jordan River, where he was baptized along with many others by John.

Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan River

In the Gospel of Mark, we read: “On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” (Mark 1:10-11)

John's baptism was a “baptism of repentance and conversion.” It used the symbol of water to represent the cleansing of the person and the heart. John was called the Baptist, or the one who baptizes, and he taught and spread this baptism to Israel. It was a preparation for the coming Messiah. He proclaimed to the people: “One mightier than I is coming after me.... I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:7-8)

When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, John the Baptist saw the Holy Spirit descend in the form of a dove and rest upon Him, he knew that this was Christ, the Lamb of God who had come to take away the sins of the world. (John 1:29)

Therefore, the baptism in the Jordan River is also an epiphany. It is a manifestation of the Messiah's identity and a work of redemption. It culminates in "another baptism," that is, His death and resurrection. In this way, the whole world will be cleansed with the fire of God's mercy (Luke 12:49-50).

Today, as a community of faith, we're celebrating the baptism of Jesus. At the same time, we are celebrating our own baptism. Let us meditate on the meaning of our baptism and how we are to live as baptized people through the Scriptures in today's liturgy.

First Reading: God Raises Up His People (Isaiah 55:1-11)

In the First Reading, God is addressing His people as an educator. He is calling the Israelites to attention. He reminds the Israelites that they are looking for the wrong spring to satisfy their thirst and hunger: “Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages

for what does not satisfy? Only listen to me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare.” (Isaiah 55:2) God is trying to give us food and drink, good things that will benefit us. But sometimes we don't use what we have for good but use it in vain. In some cases, we even make it harmful.

God is giving us His word. He knows that we are in trouble as soon as we leave Him. Like the prodigal son in the parable, we lose our human dignity.

Therefore, God shows us and promises us that He is infinite in His mercy. He promises that His thoughts and ways are not like those of man, that we can always return to Him if we only accept His word, and that as a result, our lives will bear good fruit as the rain waters the soil. (Isaiah 55:10-11)

Gospel: John the Baptist as the educator who leads us to the encounter with Jesus (Mark 1:7-11)

In today's Gospel and the Second Reading, we see the witness of the faithful as the first and most important thing to share and nurture faith in Jesus.

The Gospel tells us that John the Baptist was a great educator who led his disciples to Jesus with his testimony. He did not try to elevate himself or keep them attached to him, but simply led them to Jesus. John was a great prophet, and his reputation was very great.

When Jesus appeared on the scene, John withdrew. He said, “One mightier than I is coming after me.... I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the holy Spirit.” (Mark 1:7-8) He simply and incessantly announced the coming of Jesus to the people.

A true educator never wants his disciples to be tied to him and become his property. He wants them to learn one thing, the truth, and he wants each one of them to be firmly connected to that truth.

Let us renew our baptismal promises!

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to make us disciples of Jesus today. Let us ask that our baptism be more than just a religious ceremony but the origin for us to continually reflect on how we should live as believers. We often forget that baptism is fundamental to Christians. Let us remember that baptism means a participation in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. May all Christians participate in that mystery. Through baptism, we are made children of God by Jesus the Son, and we become His disciples. Therefore, we must tirelessly strive to be like Jesus. Let us pray and seek to be more generous and compassionate to our neighbors,

always seeking God's will.

Prayer

As followers of Jesus, let us renew our baptismal promises. May we bear witness to who Jesus is through our life together in the modern world.

Let us pray to the Lord that people may discover that the Gospel of Jesus is the way to build a more humane and fraternal society.

God our Father, help us to live with Christian joy as we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus in midst of the pandemic crisis brought by the new coronavirus. May we be as humble as John the Baptist. May we always remember that the Messiah is Jesus, not us, and may we be instruments of your love and compassion in this new year.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Note: All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE).