

Baptism of the Lord - A  
Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7;  
Acts 10:34-38;  
Matthew 3:13-17  
Little Flower - 1/12/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. As I mentioned last week, in earlier centuries and even in Eastern Christianity today, the baptism of Jesus was and is a major theme in the celebration of the Epiphany. In Latin Rite Catholicism, a separate feast of the baptism of the Lord was only instituted in 1960. The baptism of the Lord was celebrated on January 13, which had been the Octave Day of the Epiphany. Now it is the Sunday following the Epiphany and marks the conclusion of the liturgical season of Christmas.

In the New Testament, we only hear the voice of God the Father three times: at Jesus' baptism; at his transfiguration, and one time in John's Gospel. In today's Gospel, God the Father authenticates Jesus as his Son: "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*" This was very important. Jewish tradition maintained that when the Messiah came, he would be recognized and acknowledged by the Jewish leaders. As we know, Jesus would be repudiated by them. However, if Jesus was fathered and authenticated by God himself, recognition and acknowledgment by the Jewish leaders was not important. God himself was the Father of Jesus.

However, Jesus' baptism, the voice of the Father, and the appearance of the Holy Spirit were not only about Jesus as Son of God but also about his mission. In today's reading from Isaiah, God said, "*Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, Upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations.*" His mission was to be a "*light for the nations to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.*" In fact, the baptism of Jesus marked the beginning of his public ministry.

Therefore, today's feast challenges us to rethink the meaning of our own baptism. According to Catholic teaching, baptism washes away original sin. Baptism gives us the new life of grace, i.e., the gift of God's life and love, the Holy Spirit. Baptism makes us sons and daughters of God and members of the Church, God's family. This is all true and all very important. However, it misses an essential part of baptism, any sense of mission. Our baptism is about more than our personal salvation and about our membership in the Church. It is about our part in the mission of the Church.

In other words, it is not enough that we strive to avoid sin, do good works, attend Sunday Mass, and participate in the life of the parish. We have to make the mission of Christ, the mission of the Church, our own. That threefold mission, as you know, is to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed, to be healers, reconcilers, bridge builders, peacemakers, and to be leaders, i.e., to be lights to the world. Each of us has to find our own way to live this mission, but this is our vocation as Christians. Please remember that Little Flower Parish is not my parish. It is your parish. If this is your parish, you need to have a voice in defining this parish's unique mission. However, you also need to be very engaged in helping this parish carry out its vocation on the Eastside of Indianapolis.

My brothers and sisters, today's second reading gives us insight into how we can live our mission. When Jesus was baptized, "*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power.*" The power that Jesus received was the power to do good and to heal through the presence of God with him. When we were baptized, like Jesus, we were anointed with the Holy Spirit and power because the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God's love, is power. The Holy Spirit empowers us to do good and to heal because God, who is love, is present within us.