

Baptism of the Lord - B
Isaiah 55:1-11;
1 John 5:1-9;
Mark 1:7-11
Little Flower - 1/10/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus. The celebration of the Baptism of Jesus marks the end of the Christmas liturgical season.

In today's Gospel, we see John the Baptist fulfilling his role as the last prophet of the Old Testament and the first prophet of the New Testament, as the bridge between the two testaments. In the first part of the Gospel, he announces the imminent coming of Jesus. In the second part, he announces his arrival by baptizing him.

However, what is most important is what happened when Jesus came up from the water. The Spirit, like a dove, descended upon him, and the voice of God the Father came from the heavens, "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.*" The great revelation of the New Testament is that there are three persons in one God. This revelation was implicit at Jesus' baptism, which marked the beginning of his public ministry. This is part of why we baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The words of the Father are critically important. In the time of Jesus, the Jewish people believed that when the Christ or Messiah came, he would be recognized and accepted by their leaders. This is exactly what did not happen with Jesus because Jesus failed to meet their expectations. The people were looking for a political messiah, someone who would drive out the Romans and restore Israel to the greatness it had in the days of Kings David and Solomon. On the contrary, Jesus taught that the only true salvation is salvation from sin. Because he challenged their faith and their values, they rejected him. However, although they rejected him, it really did not matter because at his baptism and the transfiguration, the Father affirmed and validated him.

Tragically, this past week demonstrated that even 2000 years after Christ we are still looking for a political messiah. We still have not learned that the only true salvation is salvation from sin which requires a change of heart on the part of all of us.

During the sacrament of baptism, many symbols are used. The most important symbol, of course, is water. Jesus could not have chosen a more perfect symbol for baptism. Just as physical water washes away dirt, we believe that baptism washes away original sin. Just as flowing water is life giving in nature, the waters of baptism give us new life in Christ. In effect, by choosing water as the primary symbol of baptism, Jesus was saying that the waters of baptism are as important to eternal life as physical water is to physical life.

Today's reading from Isaiah captures the life-giving qualities of water: "*For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful.*" Implanted in our nature is a thirst for God. At the beginning of the reading, God issues an invitation to us, "*All you who are thirsty, come to the water! ...come without paying and without cost.*" In Scripture, the Son of God is often referred to as the Word. At the end of the reading, Isaiah prophesies that Jesus would be life giving like the rain and snow: "*my word shall not return to me void but shall do my will, achieving the end for which I sent it.*"

My brothers and sisters, baptism is the sacrament of rebirth. In today's second reading, St. John tells us that everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is begotten by God and whoever believes that Jesus is the Son of God is victorious over the world. We cannot love God without loving Christ. We demonstrate our faith and our love for God by keeping the commandments. At the end of the reading, we are told that the Spirit is the one who testifies. When we live our faith and love for God by loving and serving others, the Spirit of God testifies through us.