

## GOSPEL

MATTHEW 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness.’ Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’

## A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today, the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus, the Gospel describes the scene which occurred at the River Jordan: Jesus, too, is in the midst of the penitent crowd which approaches John the Baptist to receive baptism. He stood in line. John would like to prevent him from [being baptized], saying: “I need to be baptized by you”. The Baptist, indeed, is aware of the great distance there is between him and Jesus. But Jesus has come precisely to bridge the gap between man and God: if He is completely on God’s side, He is also completely on mankind’s side, and reunites what had been separated. For this reason he asks John to baptize him, so that all righteousness may be fulfilled, namely, that the plan of God may be fulfilled, the plan which passes by way of obedience and solidarity with fragile and sinful mankind, the way of humility and of God’s full closeness to his children. Because God is very close to us, very close!

At the moment in which Jesus, baptized by John, comes out of the waters of the River Jordan, the voice of God the Father is heard from on high: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”. At the same time the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, alights upon Jesus, who publicly begins his mission of salvation; a mission characterized by a manner: the way of

a humble and gentle servant, armed only with the power of truth, as Isaiah had prophesied: “He will not cry or lift up his voice, ... a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice”. A humble and gentle servant.

This is Jesus’ way, as well as the manner of Christ’s disciples’ missionary work: To proclaim the Gospel with gentleness, but also firmness, without shouting, without reprimanding anyone, but gently and firmly, without arrogance or imposition. The true mission is never proselytism, but drawing people to Christ. But how? How is this attraction to Christ achieved? With one’s own witness, starting from the unwavering union with him in prayer, in adoration and in concrete works of charity, which is service to Jesus present in the least of his brothers and sisters. In imitation of Jesus, the good and merciful Shepherd, and moved by his grace, we are called to make our life a joyous testimony that illuminates the way, that brings hope and love.

This feast makes us rediscover the gift and the beauty of being a community of baptized, that is, of sinners — we all are sinners — saved by the grace of Christ, truly integrated, by the work of the Holy Spirit, in the filial relationship of Jesus with the Father, welcomed into the bosom of Mother Church, making possible a brotherhood that knows no barriers or borders.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What have you learnt about Jesus from this Gospel and the reflection by Pope Francis.
- Have you ever experienced the same sense of unworthiness as John the Baptist does in this Gospel. Can you describe the situation and feeling that accompanied this?
- How does it make you feel, that God the Father thinks of you as a beloved son or daughter?

## PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer  
with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the ‘Glory Be’ or similar prayer.