

GOSPEL*Luke 3:15-16. 21-22*

A feeling of expectancy had grown among the people, who were beginning to think that John might be the Christ, so John declared before them all, 'I baptise you with water, but someone is coming, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire.'

Now when all the people had been baptised and while Jesus after his own baptism was at prayer, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily shape, like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you.'

REFLECTION BY POPE BENEDICT XVI*13 January, 2013 (Excerpt)*

With this Sunday following the Epiphany the Christmas Season draws to a close: the time of light, the light of Christ who appears, like the new sun on the horizon of humanity, dispelling the shadows of evil and ignorance. We celebrate today the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus: that Child, Son of the Virgin, whom we contemplated in the mystery of his Birth. We behold him today as an adult immersing himself in the waters of the River Jordan and thereby sanctifying all water and the whole world, as the Eastern Tradition stresses. But why did Jesus, in whom there is no shadow of sin, go to be baptized by John? Why did he perform that gesture of penitence and conversion, beside all those people who in this way were trying to prepare for the coming of the Messiah? That gesture — which marks the start of Christ's public life — comes in continuity with the Incarnation, the descent of God from the highest heaven into the abyss of hell. The meaning of this movement of divine lowering is expressed in a single word: love, the very name of God. The Apostle John writes: "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him", and he sent him "to be the expiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:9-10). That is why the first public act of Jesus was to receive baptism from John, who, seeing him approaching, said:

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29).

Luke the Evangelist recounts that while Jesus, having received baptism, "was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased" (3:21-22). This Jesus is the Son of God who is totally immersed in the will of the Father's love. This Jesus is the One who will die on the cross and rise again through the power of the same Spirit who now descends upon him and consecrates him. This Jesus is the new man who wills to live as the son of God, that is, in love; the man who in the face of the evil of the world, by choosing the path of humility and responsibility he chooses not to save himself but to offer his own life for truth and justice. Being Christian means living like this, but this kind of life involves a rebirth: to be reborn from on high, from God, from Grace. This rebirth is the Baptism, which Christ gives to the Church in order to regenerate men and women to new life. An ancient text attributed to St Hippolytus states: "Whoever goes down into these waters of rebirth with faith renounces the devil and pledges himself to Christ. He repudiates the enemy and confesses that Christ is God, throws off his servitude, and is raised to filial status" (Discourse on the Epiphany, 10: PG 10, 862).

Following tradition, this morning I had the joy of baptizing a large group of infants who were born in the past three or four months. At this moment, I would like to extend my prayers and my blessing to all newborn babes; but above all I would like to invite you all to remember your own Baptism, the spiritual rebirth that opened the way to eternal life to us. May every Christian... rediscover the beauty of being reborn from on high, from the love of God, and live as a child of God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: What has been your understanding of Baptism? Has this reflection changed that in anyway? If so, how?



Heart: If the heavens opened up above you and God spoke audibly about you, what do you think he would say?



Hands: What would it look like to you to live more like a child of God?

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. Offer 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 praying the ‘Glory Be’.