

## GOSPEL

LUKE 3:15-16, 21-22

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

## A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today, at the conclusion of the Liturgical Season of Christmas, we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. The liturgy calls us to more fully get to know Jesus, whose birth we have just celebrated; and for this reason the Gospel illustrates two important elements: Jesus' relationship with the people and Jesus' relationship with the Father.

In the narrative of the Baptism, administered to Jesus by John the Baptist in the waters of the Jordan, we see first and foremost the role of the people. Jesus is in the midst of the people. This is not just background scenery, but is an essential component of the event. Before immersing himself in the water, Jesus 'immerses' himself in the crowd; he joins it, fully taking on the human condition, sharing everything, except sin. In his divine holiness, full of grace and mercy, the Son of God became flesh precisely to take upon himself and take away the sin of the world: taking on our miseries, our human condition. Thus today's event is also an epiphany, because by going to have himself baptized by John, in the midst of the repentant people, Jesus manifests the logic and meaning of his mission.

By joining the people who ask John for the Baptism of conversion, Jesus shares with them the deep desire for

inner renewal. And the Holy Spirit, who descends upon him "in bodily form, as a dove" (v. 22), is a sign that with Jesus a new world is being initiated, a 'new creation' in which all those who welcome Jesus into their life participate. The words of the Father are also addressed to each of us, that we may be reborn with Christ in Baptism: "Thou art my beloved son; with thee I am well pleased" (v. 22). This Fatherly love, which all of us received on the day of our Baptism, is a flame that was lit in our heart, and needs to be kindled by means of prayer and charity.

The second element emphasized by Luke the Evangelist is that, after his immersion in the people and in the waters of the Jordan, Jesus 'immerses' himself in prayer, that is, in communion with the Father. Baptism is the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, of his mission in the world as the envoy of the Father in order to manifest his goodness and his love for mankind. This mission is fulfilled in constant and perfect union with the Father and with the Holy Spirit. The Church's mission too, and that of each of us, in order to be faithful and fruitful, is called to 'graft' ourselves onto that of Jesus. It means regenerating continually in prayer, evangelization and the apostolate, in order to bear a clear Christian witness not according to human designs, but according to the plan and style of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is a propitious opportunity to renew with gratitude and conviction the promises made at our Baptism, by committing ourselves to live in harmony with it daily. It is also very important, as I have said to you many times, to know the date of our Baptism. I could ask: 'Who among you knows the date of his or her Baptism?'. Not everyone, to be sure. If some of you do not know it, when you get home, ask your parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, godparents, family friends.... Ask: 'On what date was I baptized?'. And then, do not forget it: let it be a date kept in your heart to be celebrated every year.

May Jesus, who saved us not for our own merits but in order to realize the

immense goodness of the Father, make us merciful toward all. May the Virgin Mary, Mother of Mercy, be our guide and our model.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Share briefly what you know about your own Baptism - it's date, why you were baptized, what it meant for you, it's meaning for those around you?
- In what ways have you experienced the reality of being a son or daughter of God the Father with whom he is well pleased? Do you recognise this to be true?
- Jesus was immersed with 'the people' and 'with the Father' - how might we strengthen our lives of prayer and action in the service of God's mission this year?

## 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.