

The Baptism of the Lord
January 13, 2019
“From Remorse to Renewal”

Is 40:1...11

Tit 2:11...3:7

Lk 3:15...22

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

We have all hurt other people. The best of us has brought pain into the lives and hearts of others. Even when we never intended it, we have done harm to someone. And the sad fact is that often we are unaware of what we have done.

One of the consequences of having harmed others is remorse when we realize what we have done. This awareness can be a gradual process, or it can come like a blinding flash of light. And when it does come, we want to make amends. We want to apologize. We want to right the wrong. We want to make up, somehow, for what we have done.

However, often enough, the one we have hurt is unapproachable. They refuse to see us. They are gone – maybe even from this earth. And yet, our need to be forgiven persists. Somehow, we must be set free from the burdens of guilt and disassociation that we carry.

Fortunately, God can do this for us, even when no one else can. Moreover, the scriptures for today shed a great deal of light upon this subject.

The Chosen People were exiled and in Babylon. The faithful among them understood this as the nation’s failure to be faithful to God and to the Covenant. However, God did not want the faithful ones to lose heart. So Isaiah spoke words of comfort to them.

Because they had realized the harm they had done, and the good they had failed to do – Because they had turned their hearts back to God – Because they had suffered more than enough – God had forgiven them and would restore them.

God would gather the faithful ones, care for them, and lead them back to their homeland like a shepherd does for his flock. Such is the love and mercy of God for those who truly love Him!

In his Letter to Titus, St. Paul teaches us that the grace – the overwhelming and all-embracing love – of God for us has appeared in Jesus. No matter what harm we have done, if we have tried to right those wrongs, God will forgive us even when others will not!

However, God did not send Jesus because of any good we have done, but because of His mercy. Jesus came, ministered to us, then suffered and died so that we could respond with love and gratitude in return. It is because Jesus did so much and gave so much for us, that, hopefully, we can change our hearts and lives. We can do for all others something of what God has done for us out of mercy and love! Moreover, we can do this with eager hearts!

In the Gospel passage, Jesus did not need the baptism of John. Nor did he need to convert his heart or change his life. Jesus submitted to the baptism of John to show his unity with us in the human condition – and his solidarity with the mission of John. That mission was to prepare human hearts for the advent of God.

What is noteworthy, is that only while Jesus was at prayer, did the Father speak. Jesus was His beloved, divine Son, and God was pleased with what the human Jesus was doing.

This was living his life totally open to the plan and to the will of God!

Brothers and Sisters, God does not owe us anything. We are not owed love, mercy, or forgiveness. In fact, God loves and forgives us, precisely, so that we can respond to that love, change our hearts, and become more and more the sons and daughters whom He has created us to be!

Although God owes us nothing, we can gain His favor. We can gain God's favor by repenting of our sins. We can make amends. We can pray, in silence, as Jesus did. Then the fire of the Holy Spirit can burn away all that is harmful in our lives, all that is unworthy of us, and help us restore the balance that we have upset by our sins!

So, let us pray, today, that we can open our hearts to the call of God, His action in our lives, and the good He calls us to do!

Amen.

January 13, 2019

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