

BAPTISM OF THE LORD WE SHARE IN THE SONSHIP OF CHRIST

We celebrate the baptism of the Lord today and it marks the end of the Christmas season. Jesus started His public ministry after His baptism. He was led by the Spirit into the desert to fast and pray to prepare Himself for the purpose for which He came into this world.

The teachings of the Church tell us that baptism washes away sin and makes us children of God and members of the Church. Like circumcision, which was a mark of Jewish citizenship, so also baptism is a mark of being a member of the Christian community.

If baptism washes away sin, then one may ask why Jesus was baptized, since He is God? Jesus was baptized so that He would make the waters of baptism holy, and most especially so that He might be made known that He is the Messiah. This is what we heard in the gospel, that after “He had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased’”.

John the Baptist also testified to the fact that it was through the Lord’s baptism that he knew that He was the Messiah. “I did not know Him, but the reason why I came baptizing with water was that He might be made known to Israel...I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from the sky and remain upon Him. I did not know Him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, He is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit’. Now I have seen and I testify that He is the Son of God,” (Jn.1:31-34).

It is to reveal the glory of God to Israel that the prophet Isaiah told the Israelites to prepare their hearts. They were to rejoice, because God was going to send the Messiah to redeem them. Their service as slaves was going to end, and they would be carried like a shepherd carrying his lambs.

We are privileged to be baptized with the Holy Spirit and water. Thus we have died with Christ and risen with Him; (Rom.6:3-6). In this case the self which belongs to sin should be destroyed and we should be free from the slavery of sin.

But Christ has not only made our baptismal waters holy, and we have not only become new members of His body, He has also come to teach us how to live a righteous life. This is what we heard in the second reading that, "The grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age".

We are to reflect on the importance of our baptism and the graces we have received, not because of our righteous deeds, but because of the mercy of God through His Son Jesus Christ. The water used washed away the sins we had, and brought us life. The oil is to strengthen us and to make one with Christ as a priest, prophet, and king. The white cloth is to remind us of the pure state we have become, and the light is to make us walk as the children of light and to let our light shine for others to see.

Using these simple and common objects, God shows His power to save. He tells us how He can change our lives and make us great if we follow His dictates. This is also seen in the action of Christ when He healed the sick and fed the people; (He used spittle to heal the dumb man; Mk. 8:33); the simple outward signs performed during baptism bring us enormous inward grace.

How are we living out our baptismal promises? We promised to reject Satan and his works and promises; we professed faith in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the teachings of the Church. How many times have we broken these promises? We may not even think about them, but the more we break them the more we move away from Christ, and the more we make the devil happy. Jesus is the beloved Son in whom God is well-pleased, and it is from Him that we receive grace in abundance, and we share in His sonship.