

St Pius & St Anthony Feast Baptism of Lord Homily 2026 Year A Matt

God is so good to us, to draw us in, as God's family, calling us His own (Isaiah 43:1) in baptism. And baptism is that: an ever-expanding family, of new members being reborn into that fellowship of/with God. We celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, but that invites us to renew our own belonging by recommitting ourselves to more faithfully living out that bond of charity with God and with one another. When I think of the action of baptism's waters flowing out abundantly from God, to draw us more and more into life with Him, this memory comes to mind (a learning experience for a new priest!) I was manning that confessional that Saturday afternoon, and sometimes many penitents would visit and sometimes few to none, maybe. So this one slow afternoon, I had quietly prayed in the confessional alone a while, and I thought I would step out and maybe straighten the hymnals or walk the Stations while I waited. Stepping out, I remembered that they had cleaned out the baptismal pool that week, and the pool basin was still empty-dry. So I thought, while I am here, I can refill it for the new water to be blessed at evening mass. So, I went to the closet and turned the necessary valves open and began filling it with fresh water. It was a pool, so it'll take a while, and I went back to walking through the pews straightening hymnals. Then I hear the door open, so I quickly returned to my station. And one, and then another visit. (All good!) Back to routine, penitents in and out, and as I sat waiting with a pause, praying, I hear voices and commotion, and someone busting back into the confessional excitedly, "Father, Father, /I don't want to disturb you but water is streaming across the sanctuary floor, it's a waterfall down the steps...." "Oh no, I forgot!" How's the 23rd psalm go, not my 'cup runneth over' but the pool runneth over! We got it all, mopped and dried up, barely in time for mass, and did have to leave out the 'yellow caution signs' for possibly still slick spots! A lesson for me, of how abundantly expansive the flowing water of baptism can be, to reach out & draw us in (also taught me not to try 'multitasking' in ministry!)

But again, how good God is, to love us into His family through Christ, by our baptism! As 1 John 4:10 tells us, "not that we loved God, but that he first loved us" by grace calling us not only His creation, but His children (not just making us but making us His Own!) that God can say of us, what God said of Jesus in gospel "Behold my child with whom I am well pleased!" What a gift that humbles us!

And God's humility (a marvel) in coming to us, to be in relationship with us. I know John feels that in the gospel – his humble reaction to Jesus- Jesus coming to be baptized by him-John! I love his surprised response, "What, you come to me?" I say, 'Like mother. Like son' because John echoes what his mother said to

Mary (& baby Jesus within Mary) when they came to Elizabeth's home at the Visitation. Elizabeth says, "Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43). A scene of humility graciously offered and graciously received!

We've all been there I bet, experiencing what I call the 'door dance', when you approach a door behind someone, and they grab handle-stepping aside, opening it for you, "Come ahead, please" inviting you in, but so moved, you may curtsy bowing with forward directed hand, "Oh no, you go first", to only hear back, "Oh, I insist, come...." A little dance of grace! Or don't we see cars do a version of that at 4-way stops, when each person gestures the other on, to only then inch forward, but stop as the other inches forward too..." Each move matches the other

I see such an example of generosity meeting generosity, or humility meeting humility in today's gospel. Jesus presents himself for baptism, yet John seems to say 'You baptize me first...', to which Jesus says, "Allow if for now..." (Mt 3:15). When I see such a 'showdown-ing' of humility, which is as it should be—Jesus taught it ('the least is greatest' Lk 9:48 & 'servant is leader' Matt 23:11) and St Paul advises in his letter to the Romans 12:10, "Outdo one another in showing honor to the other" (*also, "regard others as more important than yourself" (Philippians 2:3)*, This humility makes me wonder if anyone is actually in heaven, or if everyone is standing at attention at the door, not wanting to step (presume & push) ahead of anyone else (*like at reception banquet tables that no one will sit down at, for fear of presuming a seat that is not theirs, or how hard it is to get people to start the line and going thru buffet at a church funeral meal!!*)

But it is a dilemma for John, because Jesus is the one John preached was coming and bringing a superior baptism—'fire and the Holy Spirit' (Mt 3:11). What possibly could John offer Jesus? Well, Jesus tells us that it should happen, for 'fulfillment' Mt 3:15 -"for us to fulfill all righteousness." A major emphasis for Matthew's Gospel is 'prophetic fulfillment' It is about following through on the work of others, and completing prophecy. Matthew's, is the most sensitive gospel concerned to show how Jesus checks all the boxes to be verified as the Messiah! Matthew on at least 12 occasions (1:22–23; 2:5–6; 2:15; 2:17–18; 2:23; 4:14–16; 8:17; 12:17–21; 13:14–15; 13:35; 21:4–5; 27:9–10)gives an exact scripture quote from the Old Testament to explain or account for why a specific event happens in Jesus' life (like last week, when we heard that Hosea 11:1 "Out of Egypt I called my son" was fulfilled when Joseph fled with Mary/Jesus to Egypt to escape Herod, before eventually returning to Nazareth up north!) So, 12 times we get verbatim quotes, but over 40 times in Matthew's gospel, he mentions 'fulfillment' (like today's

when likely Malachi 4:5-6 is being alluded to, that an Elijah figure will bring attention to, name and identify the Messiah when He shows up).

But in addition to the prophecy being fulfilled by John's being the one to point out Jesus (*and not just John testifying, but also the Father's voice and Dove-fire of the Holy Spirit coming down on Jesus*) , it also makes perfect sense to me that this is how humility works. It doesn't praise itself! That is the humility of Christ: Jesus never presumptively says, "I am God, worship ME", so I see the logic that the 'good in another must be pointed out by 'another other' – Self doesn't' do it! It is not humility that, as they say, 'toots its own horn', or 'pats itself on its back'. Such self-promotion defeats itself. Proverbs 27:2, Solomon says just that, "Let another praise you." And St Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:3-4, "Love is not inflated, nor seeks its own interest..." I like the story about the village that had a contest to name the most humble citizen, and but had to give up the idea, after everyone named rejected the honor- and wouldn't claim the prize! I think this is behind Jesus' response even when He is cornered by High Priest, (Matt 26:63-64) when the priest demanded, "I order you to tell us under oath before the living God whether you are the Messiah, the Son of God", Jesus responds, "You say, so?" And again, Jesus humbly deflects when Pilate asks "Are you King of the Jews?" Jesus offers the same "You say, so?" (Lk 23:3) So, Jesus submitting to John's baptism is His humility made manifest – this must be done to fulfill righteousness. His whole ministry will be such a selfless putting of others ahead of Him.

Jesus' baptism is His identification with us. We need it, He doesn't. We have to be baptized, but He loves, and so is baptized for us. He does this for us. Jesus wants to fulfill our righteousness by having us 'follow Him' through baptism, and so submits Himself, undergoing baptism to set the example for us. He opens the door of grace to us, leading us along this way of compassionate service as fellow children of God to one another. As always the great leader never asks us to do anything he didn't; do Himself. He was baptized to show us the Way – and invites us to do the same- to follow Him.