

The Baptism of John the Baptist



Today we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord by John the Baptist. We've heard the story lots of times. John's baptizing at the river and Jesus gets in line along with everyone else. But, why? He was the Son of God. He came down from heaven and would soon go back. Why did He need to be baptized? The answer is that He didn't. Jesus didn't need to be baptized, but you and I needed Him to be baptized. Saint Maximus of Turin, one of the Church Fathers, wrote "**Christ is baptized, not to be made holy by the water, but to make the water holy.**"

If you remember your grade school science you know that water evaporates, forms clouds, and returns to earth. The cycle repeats itself over and over. The wind blows the clouds so that the water that evaporates in one place comes down somewhere else. Eventually every drop of water on earth is connected to every other drop. When Jesus made the water of the Jordan holy, he made all water holy.

Obviously Jesus thought baptism was very important. In John's Gospel He said, "Unless a man is reborn in water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." In Matthew's Gospel he tells the Apostles, "Go, make disciples of all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit." Baptism is our response to Christ.

Here's what the Church says about the three sacraments of initiation, baptism, confirmation, and first communion, straight from the baptism rite: "***Through the sacraments of Christian initiation men and women are freed from the power of darkness. With Christ they die, are buried, and rise again.***" Notice it says "with Christ." Just like Maximus said, Jesus had to be baptized first. "***They receive the Spirit of adoption which makes them God's sons and daughters and, with the entire people of God, they celebrate the memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection.***"

Here's what the book says specifically about baptism: "***Through baptism men and women are incorporated into Christ. They are formed into God's people, and they obtain forgiveness of all their sins. They are raised from their natural human condition to the dignity of adopted children. They become a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. Hence they are called, and are indeed, the children of God.***"

Jesus died and rose from the dead to defeat death, to save all of us from our sins. But what He does today makes it possible for us individually to be one of his people. Baptism is the beginning of our journey of faith. Jesus' seemingly unnecessary decision to be baptized by John, someone "not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals", is actually the beginning of **OUR** journey of faith.

Personally I was baptized at the age of twenty so I do remember receiving the sacrament, especially how hard it was for my godfather to hold me over the baptismal font. But for

most of us, christened as babies, it's good that we celebrate today to remind us of the promises our parents made for us. This is what we ask the parents who present their child for the sacrament. ***"You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?"*** At this point the parents answer, **"We do."**

Then we ask the godparents if they're ready to help the parents in their duty as Christian parents. They answer **"We do."** Then the deacon or the priest says ***"The Christian community welcomes you with great joy. In its name I claim you for Christ our Savior by the sign of the cross on your forehead, and invite your parents and godparents to do the same."***



Then we have a reading or two, maybe a homily, some prayers and then the actual baptism. But before we bring out the water, we ask the parents to renounce sin and to renew their own baptismal promises. We tell the parents, ***"On your part, you must make it your constant care to bring her up in the practice of the faith. See that the divine life which God gives her is kept safe from the poison of sin, to grow always stronger in her heart."***

"If your faith makes you ready to accept this responsibility, renew now the vows of your own baptism. Reject sin; profess your faith in Jesus Christ. This is the faith of the Church. This is the faith in which this child is about to be baptized."

Then the baptism takes place, we say a couple of more prayers, the family takes a lot of pictures then everyone adjourns for a nice lunch.

Even if you don't remember your own baptism, you probably remember your kids' or your grandkids'. Maybe you've been a godparent a time or two. So you're probably wondering why I'm giving you this baptismal instruction. As usual, I'm taking the scenic route to make a point. Also, I want to make a disclaimer. If I've baptized your child and you're sitting here in church today, what I'm about to say doesn't apply to you. You get it. You're following up on the promises you made that day for yourself and your baby. Congratulations!

But often, too often, after the baby is baptized, after the parents and godparents have said they clearly understand what they're undertaking; after they promise to raise him or her in the faith, after everyone has renewed their baptismal promises, **WE NEVER SEE ANY OF THEM AGAIN!** Like I said, there are a lot of exceptions which give all of us hope. And sometimes we baptize kids whose grandparents are in the parish but who live somewhere else. They want to have the kids baptized in their home parish. My son and daughter-in-law are in that group. I've baptized my two grandkids here, but their parish is

in O'fallon, MO. It's understandable that that happens sometimes. I'm not talking about them either.

The point I'm trying to make is this: Baptism is a big deal. It's a big enough deal that Jesus had Himself baptized, even though He didn't really need it. He did it for us. But too many of us don't take it seriously. A lot of babies get baptized because the grandparents insist on it, even if mom and dad haven't seen the inside of a church since their wedding day, if then.

Some parents don't really have a clue of why they're doing it, but they know that they were baptized, and their friend's kids are getting baptized, so they'd better call the church. After all, christening pictures are always cute and they don't want to be left out. A lot of the time they're more interested in what the baby's going to wear, sometimes something really old that they wore for their own baptism, what they're going to have for lunch, and those all-important pictures.

The Church says that parents are the first and most important teachers and I agree with that 100%. It's up to us to bring our kids up in the faith. As a lot of us know, we aren't always successful. Sometimes they go their own way. Then it's up to us to pray them back. But I promise, if we don't lead them by our example, taking them to mass every Sunday, taking them to PSR or Catholic school, if we don't pray with them and for them, then our chances of success are a big, fat zero.

But, even if they are no small people in your life, it's good to remember our own baptismal promises. To remember that we rejected Satan and all his works and empty promises. It's good to think about the words of the Creed that we'll recite in just a few minutes. Not to just recite it along with everyone else, but to actually think about what we're saying.

We're talking about our immortal souls and the immortal souls of our children. Jesus did much more than His share to save us, but we have to do our part, too. Remember what God the Father said in today's Gospel. "You are my beloved Son. With you I am well pleased." I don't know about you, but I'd like to hear those words myself when I meet Him face to face.

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