

Sunday January 9, 2022

## **Baptism of the Lord Parishioner Reflection**

*By: Jim McDonald*

Today we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. This short reflection can only scratch the surface of such an important event (understatement) in Jesus' earthly life and in the life of His Church.

If you are wondering why Jesus would choose to be baptized with the baptism of John to wash away sin when Jesus is without sin, you would not be the first. By being baptized by John, Jesus fully participated in our humanity, descended even so far as to immerse himself, rose from the water (rose from the dead so to speak) and received the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove and God the Father declared that Jesus is his beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased. (Luke 3: 21-22)

Aided by the power of God, Moses led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt through the Red Sea and Aaron led the Israelites into the Promised Land through the Jordan river, both events prefiguring the Baptism of John. By being baptized with water Jesus, God himself, would lead His people – both Jews and Gentiles – in a new Exodus into the Kingdom of the Father. Jesus' baptism signalled the beginning of His proclamation of the coming of the Kingdom of God and demonstrates for us that it is essential for the life in the Spirit. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments.” (CCC 1213)

Jesus tells Nicodemus “I solemnly assure you, no one can enter into God's Kingdom without being begotten of water and spirit.” (John 3:5) In case the message wasn't clear, Jesus' last commandment to the Apostles at His ascension into Heaven was to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19) In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus is very direct. “Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation. Whoever believes in it and is baptized will be saved but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” (Mark 16:15-16 ESV CE) This is a fulfillment of Ezekiel 37, 13:14; “Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and have you rise from them, O my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may live, and I will settle you upon your land. I have promised and I will do it, says the Lord.”

Many people were baptized by John prior to Jesus' baptism, even on the same day. Their baptism marked the beginning of their faith journey. The Apostles (the Church) were tasked to guide the newly baptized in their faith journey. “Teach them to carry out everything that I have

commanded you. And know that I am with you, until the end of the world!” (Matthew 28:20 NAB)

Note that nothing is impossible for God. See Matthew 19:26. St. Dismas, the Good Thief, joined Jesus in paradise at his crucifixion because of his belief that Jesus was indeed the Son of God and he had the courage and humility to admit his guilt even while suffering on his own cross. God is infinite Love and Mercy. He has given us the power to become his children (!) through baptism but His love and mercy are unlimited. The mention of the Good Thief is not to dismiss the need for baptism or to approve of waiting until our dying breath to turn to God (not in our control!), but is an encouragement for us to pray constantly for the grace to turn to Jesus, especially in our last moments in this life, and to pray that all people receive this grace no matter what their past is like. See the Parable of Divine Mercy (Luke 15: 4-9) or The Prodigal Son (Luke 15, 11-32).

The second reading, from the Letter of Paul to Titus, is a beautiful statement of the central role and importance of the gift of Baptism in the Christian life. It is no wonder that we, as families and as a parish, celebrate Baptism at whatever age with a lavish party!