

Living the Spirit
Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

With the feast of the Lord's Baptism the Christmas season comes to an end liturgically. In an older rite, in the calendar before its reformation after Vatican II, this day was celebrated as the Octave of the Epiphany. Before that a still older rite celebrated the Baptism of Jesus. So today the feast manages to combine both celebrations, even as it brings us to the start of the Lord's public mission.

It is interesting to see that the baptism of the Lord is accepted almost universally by most Christian scholars as an historical event. Its meaning, however, is not easily understood by all. In presenting himself for the baptism of John, Jesus submitted himself to the will of the Father, humbly placing himself among sinners. He takes upon himself the sins of the world, being himself sinless. The evangelists frame the public life of Jesus with two baptisms, that in the Jordan with water and that which is seen as the baptism of his passion and death. (John 19, 34)

The baptism in the Jordan is crowned by the descent of the Holy Spirit and by the proclamation of His Sonship by the heavenly Father. For this reason we see how our baptism is itself related to all three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. We become sons and daughters to the Father by baptism and we receive the Holy Spirit with the infused graces and gifts of faith, hope and charity. The soul is sealed by the Holy Spirit with a mark that remains forever.

Baptism is a sacrament. By it we have been purified and sanctified. Original sin is washed away. This purification has not only an individual character but a communal one. We become members of the Church, a part of the people of God.

There is so much more to the theology of Baptism. It is not my intention to write an extensive summary of this Sacrament. Nor do I want to speak to all the laws of the Church that are related to baptism. It will be enough as we celebrate this feast to make a few suggestions about our baptism. They will derive from my own meditation on this great mystery of faith. [You may have more of your own.]

Above all, we should delight that we have been called by God to be a part of His holy people. As individuals we should have a spiritual self-esteem (so valued today) in being sons and daughters of God. We should see how this gives us a loving Father who is paramount in our life, our living. We should take a moment to thank in prayer those who brought us to the font of baptism (usually our parents). We should pray for the priest (or deacon) who baptized us. We should know how rich we are in the gift of God, and not ever forget that we are a part of His royal family, from which we derive our dignity.

Our baptism began a relationship with Jesus. Thus it is that when we see ourselves as sinners, we will know He does not want to exclude us from his company. In this Year of Mercy, let us find that mercy which He offers sinners by the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which has rightly been called a spiritual second baptism.

May God love you as His child!
Msgr. David Morrison

On the reverse side you will see a beautiful icon of Divine Mercy with the prayer of the Holy Father for this Year of Mercy. Let me here thank Kathy Hochberg for her ability to put all these bulletins with art work together for me. Again, God bless you! Know you are loved by God!