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Commentary on the Gospel: Baptism of the Lord (Year B)

Gospel for the feast of the Baptism of the Lord (Cycle B), and commentary.

Gospel (*Mk* 1:7-11)

This is what John the Baptist proclaimed: “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized

by John in the Jordan. And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opened and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove; and a voice came from heaven,

“Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased.”

Commentary

The season of Christmas comes to an end with the feast of the Baptism of the Lord in the Jordan, an episode filled with mystery and a key event in Salvation History. On the shores of the Jordan we contemplate, with the same amazement as the Baptist's, how the Son of God made man voluntarily waits his turn with sinners and submits to the baptism of penance that John was preaching.

This act of solidarity by Jesus with mankind results in the Holy Trinity being revealed to us: in the voice of the Father, in the obedient listening of the incarnate Son, and in the power of the Spirit, who descends upon Him in the form of a dove. Despite the brief simplicity of Mark's narrative, it contains great theological depth and in a certain sense summarizes the work of redemption Jesus came to carry out.

Jesus immerses himself in the waters of the Jordan, which symbolizes penance, the punishment and death that mankind is afflicted with as the result of sin. The waters also symbolize Jesus' suffering on the Cross, recalling for us the waters of divine punishment in the scene of the universal flood (cf. *Gen* 6:9).

But these same waters of the Jordan, sanctified by Jesus, symbolize something more than punishment.

They are also the symbol of a new creation: that of Christian baptism. When Jesus emerges from the waters, his resurrection from the dead is prefigured, which in turn is an anticipation of our own resurrection. Hence the waters of the Jordan also recall for us the primordial waters of Genesis (cf. *Gen* 1), out of which the voice of God created all things and over which the Spirit of God hovered.

This entire episode of our Lord's Baptism therefore reveals the infinite mercy of God towards his creatures. Heaven was finally opened up for mankind when it opened for Jesus. The voice of the Father, who from all eternity calls the Word "my Beloved Son," now does so in Someone with a perfect human nature, as the first fruit for all of us. And the Holy Spirit, who proceeds eternally from the love between the Father and the Son, descends upon Jesus of Nazareth, in

an anticipation of his descent on the children of God.

Thanks to this precious gift won by our Lord on the Cross, thanks to “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” we can address God as beloved children, with affection and trust. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem tells us: “If you have sincere piety, the Holy Spirit will also descend upon you and you will hear the Father’s voice.”[1]

The joyous truth of our divine filiation can and should illuminate our whole life, leading us to live and think like Jesus himself, knowing and sensing that we are God’s children. Saint Josemaria tells us in this regard: “all this implies a genuine program of interior life, which needs to be channeled through your relationship of piety with God, through these acts (which should be few, I insist, but constant) which will enable you to develop the attitudes

and manner of a good son or daughter.”[2]

A person who realizes and senses that they are looked upon lovingly by God at every moment is filled with consolation and security, because the good God who pours out on them his unconditional affection says: “You are my beloved child.”

Now that we are entering Ordinary Time, marked by small everyday situations, we can rediscover this marvelous gift that Jesus has obtained for us on the Cross and strive to make it known to our families and friends.

[1] Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis III*, “On Baptism,” 14.

[2] Saint Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 150.

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