

Homily: Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

From St Maria Goretti Parish, Diocese of Lafayette, Indiana

It is somewhat ironic, that for most of us as Catholics, the day of our baptism, is not something that we remember. Most of us were infants when we were baptized. Our parents brought us to church. Usually we were dressed up in some special, white baptismal garments. And almost always, lots of pictures were taken. They took pictures of us with our godparents. They took pictures of us with our grandparents. They took pictures of us with the priest or deacon that baptized us. We may not remember the actual event. But thanks to Kodak, and Polaroid, and Nikon, and now the cameras on our phones, we've got pictures to prove the event took place. The pictures make the event that much more real for us, who can't remember that far back.

Of course, as we just heard, at Jesus' Baptism, they didn't need to take any pictures to make the event memorable. St. Matthew tells us today that at Jesus' Baptism the heavens opened up for Him. And He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon Him. And then of course, there's that loud voice from the heavens, booming across the sky, "This is my Beloved Son, with Whom I am well pleased." You talk about the dramatics of it all! It is interesting that for a baby born in a simple stable, on a quiet night, a silent night. That same baby all these years later, has a pretty dramatic Baptism in the Jordan River. Christmas begins with a Silent Night. But the Christmas season ends with God's voice echoing across the sky, telling the world how pleased He is with His Son!

We know, of course, that Jesus didn't need Baptism. Baptism is for us. Sinners need Baptism. The Son of God did not. St. Matthew points this out for us also in his version of the story, as even St. John the Baptist, wonders whether or not he is doing the right thing. By His Baptism though, Jesus makes holy the water of every Baptism that will take place following His. Because of Jesus' Baptism, we are baptized! And we also know how important Baptism is really is. Baptism is our way of beginning our walk with Jesus Christ. It all starts with water, and oils, and fire, and promises. That is the way that we begin the walk that eventually will lead all of us to Heaven. It all starts with Baptism.

And yet, how important it is that all of us remember our baptisms! That's a big part of this Feast Day today and every year. As we come to the end of our Christmas season, before we head into Ordinary Time, we take the time to remember that we ARE baptized people. And that, my brothers and sisters, makes us different. We aren't like everybody else. We are a unique creation of God. We have died to Christ. From the moment that all that water poured off our heads, we were a new creation in Christ. We were born again. Everything started a new! How important it is for us to NOT forget that! Today we celebrate Jesus' Baptism and the beginning of His public ministry. But today demands that we also remember our own baptisms and the beginnings of our own walks with Christ.

Today, then, becomes the perfect day to get out pictures from everyone's baptisms. Watch the video or get out the old movies. Dig out your Baptismal Candle. Talk to your parents or your Godparents today about your Baptisms. But we can't forget. We must never forget. We like Christ, were washed clean in the waters of Baptism. Now it is time to live as baptized people, working together in the Church, for the salvation of all people. Our Baptisms not only buy us a whole new way of life, but our Baptisms also get us the job and responsibility of carrying the Good News of Jesus Christ out to many others. Just like for Jesus, following His Baptism, it was time for Him to go to work. So too for us, following this Feast Day, we are reminded that it is time for all of us to go to work, building the Kingdom of God, and bringing His Gospel to every person that we come in contact with. This is a great day. On this Feast Day, we are sent out to a world that so desperately needs us, just like Jesus was, two-thousand years ago!

May we bear witness to our Baptisms with our lives, not just with our words. May we live out our Faith every day. And may we put into action, Jesus' good news, by the way that we care and get involved!