

Baptism gives us a mission

The Baptism of the Lord (January 12): (R3) Mark 1:7-11; (R1) Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; (R2) Acts of the Apostles 10:34-38.

Next Sunday we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, bringing the Christmas cycle to a close.

Why was Jesus baptized?

First, for John's sake. John needed a revelation from on high to explain the kind of Messiah Jesus was going to be. Everyone, John included, expected a political Messiah. At first, John expected the Messiah to be an avenging judge. To the Pharisees John said, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:7).

But after John had baptized Jesus, the voice from heaven made it clear that Jesus was the beloved Son of God upon whom his favor rests. The voice from heaven echoed the words of the prophet Isaiah who spoke of God's servant as being a man who would suffer. From then on, John realized that Jesus was to be the suffering servant foretold by Isaiah. Thus, the day after the baptism of Jesus, when John saw Jesus coming toward him, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." The lamb, ever since the exodus from Egypt, was the symbol of redemption by the shedding of blood.

Another reason for Jesus' baptism was to teach us what baptism is. Baptism is the fundamental sacrament of the church. Just as physical birth gives human life, so baptism is a rebirth that gives divine life. To emphasize the importance of baptism, Jesus began and ended his public life with baptism. And when his public life was drawing to a close, a soldier pierced his side and water and blood flowed from the wound to symbolize the two great sacraments of the church:



Father Albert Shamon

A word for Sunday

baptism and Eucharist.

In Eden our first parents enjoyed two great gifts: divine life, for they walked and talked with God; and great inner balance, for they were naked and did not feel the sting of the flesh. Because of his sin, man lost these two great gifts: his intimacy with God, for he hides himself; and his inner balance, for both he and she cover themselves. The great tragedy of the first fall of man was that it affected not only him but the entire human race. Thus we see man running away from God, the source of his life, and the flesh lust against the spirit.

To offset this double consequence of the first sin, baptism gives us the Holy Spirit, makes us temples of God; then, as fire lights fire, so the Holy Spirit imparts to the soul sanctifying grace, which once again makes us children of God.

To neutralize the other consequence of man's fall, the tendency to sin, baptism makes us not only children of God but children of the church. In other words, baptism puts us in a support community. As the human family helps children, so the church helps her children by word and sacrament, develops the life given at baptism. That is why she insists on Sunday Mass, on Catholic school education, on frequent confession and daily rosary. These will help us win the battle against the world, the flesh and the devil.

Lastly, as Jesus' baptism inaugurated his public life, so our baptism is a call to mission. We are baptized,

not so much for privilege as for mission. We are called to liberate, to open the eyes of the blind, to free those imprisoned by habits of sin, to build up the family of the church.

Thus at every baptism, a lighted candle is given to call the baptized to mission, to be lights in a dark world. Incidentally, that was how we got candles on birthday cakes. In Catholic countries, the day of baptism was celebrated as one's real birth and the candle given at baptism was lit.

Baptism makes one a light by giving the Holy Spirit, who gives divine life, and by inserting one in a faith community, the church, which helps one keep the light burning. And the light is given for others. So the church urges her children to radiate Christ, the light of the world, by a smile, a helping hand, by offering a listening ear, by being good and doing good. He went about doing good. Our baptism calls us to do the same.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, January 13
Hebrews 1:1-6;
Psalms 97:1, 2B, 6, 7C, 9;
Mark 1:14-20

Tuesday, January 14
Hebrews 2:5-12;
Psalms 8:2A, 5-9;
Mark 1:21-28

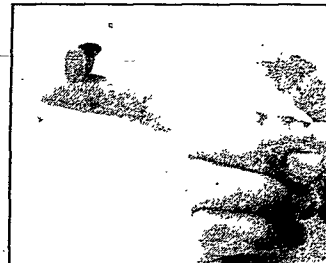
Wednesday, January 15
Hebrews 2:14-18;
Psalms 105:1-4, 6-9;
Mark 1:29-39

Thursday, January 16
Hebrews 3:7-14;
Psalms 95:6-11;
Mark 1:40-45

Friday, January 17
Hebrews 4:1-5, 11;
Psalms 78:3, 4BC, 6C-8;
Mark 2:1-12

Saturday, January 18
Hebrews 4:12-16;
Psalms 19:8-10, 15;
Mark 2:13-17

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