

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today the Church celebrates the conclusion of the Christmas Season with the Baptism of Our Lord. In the ancient Jewish tradition, baptism was recognition of one's own sinfulness and desire for conversion, to be washed away from the old self and redeemed in the new self. In his book Jesus of Nazareth, Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI reflects upon some very significant questions. One question which naturally arises is that if the essence of baptism was the washing away of sin, why was Jesus, who was sinless, baptized by John? The Holy Father offers the insight that this was so in order for Jesus to enter fully into our broken human nature, take our sins upon himself and thus heal and set us free. This explanation makes perfect sense in light of the complete mission of Jesus: baptism and public ministry, culminating in his passion, death and resurrection.

“Throughout all its history, the world is powerless to defeat the ‘strong man’; he is overcome and bound by one yet stronger, who, because of his equality with God, can take upon himself all the sin of the world and then suffer it through to the end—omitting nothing on the downward path into identity with the fallen. This struggle is the ‘conversion’ of being that brings into it a new condition, that prepares a new heaven and a new earth. Looked at from this angle, the sacrament of Baptism appears as the gift of participation in Jesus’ world-transforming struggle in the conversion of life that took place in his descent and ascent.” [Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration, Pg. 20].

Thus, in a very real sense this marks the inauguration of the public life and explicitly reflects the Trinitarian essence of this ministry: in his Baptism, there is full and integrated participation by Father, Son, and Spirit. This public expression belies that since the time of his birth and presentation in the Temple to his Baptism, there is no recorded history of the life of Jesus. We can assume he led a normal life typical of his time, working as a craftsman with his father, Joseph.

The words of Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI cited above echoes the words of the prophet Isaiah proclaimed in today's first reading. The Incarnation is the fulfillment of Isaiah's call that the Father's chosen one, with whom He is most pleased, will bring justice as leaven for the world, “as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.” These words evoke a spirit of hope and joy, that God's presence among us in the person of His Son can bring about renewal and redemption in our lives.

Pope Francis, in reflecting on the importance of how we live out our Baptismal call, wrote that “thanks to Baptism, we are capable of forgiving and to love even those who offend us and hurt us, that we can recognize in the least ones and in the poor the face of the Lord who visits us and comes close to us and with this Baptism helps us to recognize in the face of the needy, in those suffering, even in our neighbor, the face of Jesus. It is a grace of this strength of Baptism.”

May we, by God's grace, re-affirm our own baptismal promises, striving and seeking to live a life of mercy and justice. May the example of our own lives—our reception of the sacraments and commitment to prayer and gratitude to God for all his blessings imparted to us—be a light to the nations. At the end of our days, when we come to the new and eternal Jerusalem, may it be said of us that the Lord is pleased with us—for fighting the good fight for the glory and honor of God.

I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude and thanks for all of the gifts received by our parishioners this Christmas Season. I am so blessed by the generosity and spirit of thanksgiving which permeates the identity of our parish family. I pray that I may strive to express my thanksgiving to God for this very special ministry by doing the very best I can and giving my all in a spirit of joy and humility!

Fr. Tom