

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today the Church celebrates the Baptism of our Lord. In the first reading from Isaiah, the prophet foretells the coming of the Messiah. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Covenant, the “chosen one upon whom I have put my spirit.” Jesus comes to us as light, healer, and liberator. Isaiah paves the way, in a sense, and points the people of Israel towards the promise of God’s fidelity to us through the Incarnation. As Peter states so powerfully in the second reading, when he is speaking in the house of Cornelius, “God shows no partiality.” God’s grace and God’s love is available to anyone who seeks Him, no matter the circumstance or station in life. We see that God is pressing His plan of salvation history beyond the Jewish people and Jesus, doing good and healing the oppressed, is available to all who seek him.

Luke’s Gospel opens with the quite beautiful expression of the deep longings of the people who seek an encounter with the Messiah. Luke writes that the “people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ.” This speaks to our deepest human longings to be connected to and with God in a way that transcends our everyday routine and encounter. Each of us has deep longings. Our prayer and reflection help us to discern and clarify how these longings impel us towards a deeper awareness and experience of Jesus Christ and how we, through the gift of Baptism, reflect that relationship in our daily lives.

Pope Francis, in his homily in 2017 on the Baptism of the Lord wrote, “In baptism we are consecrated by the Holy Spirit. The word “Christian” means this, it means to be consecrated like Jesus, in the same Spirit in which Jesus was immersed in his whole earthly existence. He is the ‘Christ,’ the Anointed one, the consecrated one. Thus, by virtue of our own baptism, we ourselves are anointed and consecrated and called by the Spirit to exercise the proclamation of the Good News in our own lives. Pope Francis reflects further that “Baptism inserts us into the body of the Church, into the holy people of God. And in this body, in the people who are walking, faith is transmitted from generation to generation.” (Homily, Baptism of the Lord, January 11, 2015). We realize in this expression of the Holy Father our interdependence and the relational aspect of Baptism that helps is to realize that we are all part of the plan of salvation history and that the Lord invites, day by day, to express that reality in our Christian identity.

In the Rite of Baptism of Children, in the Blessing and Dismissal, there is a beautiful and powerful prayer that expresses the depths of God’s love for each one of us and how our hope and desire is fulfilled in placing our trust totally in the hands of the One who loved us first and wishes for us, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, to be a reflection of that love. “By God’s gift, through water and the Holy Spirit, we are reborn to eternal life. In his goodness, may he continue to pour out his blessings upon these sons and daughters of his. May he make them always, wherever they may be, faithful members of his holy people. May he send his peace upon all who are gathered here, in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Amen!

Fr. Tom