

**PASTOR'S MEANDERINGS
THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD**

12 – 13 JANUARY 2019



SUNDAY REFLECTION

Jesus came into the world in order to reconcile humankind with God, and through His redeeming death to free us from the power of Satan. In the Eucharist He left us a memorial of that redeeming death His body broken and His blood poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Through our baptism we are baptized into His death so that, as He rose from the dead, we too,

might rise to new life in Christ with all our sins forgiven. Blessed be Jesus in the most holy sacrament of the altar.

At the Vigil Mass at Easter each year we sing the refrain. 'The light of Christ has come into the world'. Light dispels darkness, provides warmth, generates growth and stimulates life. Symbolically, the light stands for faith, hope and the love of God brought to us through Christ His beloved Son. In Baptism we receive the light of faith, we become members of the community of believers and we are called to share in the mission of Christ, to spread the good news of the peace of God to all. To carry out this mission, in our own particular way, we are, at our baptism, embraced by the love of the Father and imbued with the Spirit who will teach us all things and be our guide and consoler on our pilgrim way through life.

We are called to live our Baptism each day, to rejoice in the gifts and the love of God always and to share those gifts with others.

Come Holy Spirit; fill the hearts of your faithful,
And enkindle in them the fire of your love,
Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created,
And you shall renew the face of the earth.

St. John of the Cross *Spiritual Canticle 37 (4)*

[Christ] is like an abundant mine so that, however deep men go, they never reach the bottom, but rather in every recess find new veins with new riches everywhere.

Erasmus

"You have been baptized, but think not that you are straightway a Christian ... The flesh is touched with salt: what then if the mind remains unsalted? The body is anointed, yet the mind remains un-anointed. But if you are buried with Christ within, and already practice walking with Him in newness of life, I acknowledge you as a Christian."

READINGS SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

20 JAN '19

Is. 62:1-5: Silence and weariness, dreariness and darkness, apathy and anonymity can never be marks of those who are faithful. When the Lord comes, a new dawn will come and new names will be known, light will shine out and all people will rejoice.

Ps. 95:1-3, 7-10: In response to God's saving Word, we proclaim His wonders to all the peoples.

1 Cor. 12:4-11: The marks of the faithful are that God the Father works in all members, God the Son animates their service and God the Holy Spirit seals them with His variety of gifts.

Jn. 2:1-11: The greatest mark of the faithful is loving generosity. This mark is shown in Christ's first public sign as He works this miracle at Cana. This is the beginning of God's journey into the heart of His people for He desires them only to witness to others the depth of His love and joy.

Second Vatican Council *'Laity'*

"Since the Creator of all things has established the conjugal partnership as the beginning and basis of human society, and by His grace, has made it a great mystery in Christ and the Church

(Eph. 5:32) the apostolate of married persons and of families is of unique importance for the Church and civil society.”



THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Today the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Baptism of Our Lord, bringing to an end the season of Christmas. The Church recalls Our Lord's second manifestation or epiphany which occurred on the occasion of His baptism in the Jordan. Jesus descended into the River to sanctify its waters and to give them the power to beget children of God. The event takes on the importance of a second creation in which the entire Trinity intervenes.

In the Eastern Church this feast is called Theophany because at the baptism of Christ in the River Jordan God appeared in three persons. The baptism of John was a sort of sacramental preparatory for the Baptism of Christ. It moved men to sentiments of repentance and induced them to confess their sins. Christ did not need the baptism of John. Although He appeared in the "substance of our flesh" and was recognized "outwardly like unto ourselves", He was absolutely sinless and impeccable. He conferred upon the water the power of the true Baptism which would remove all the sins of the world: "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him Who takes away the sin of the world".

Many of the incidents which accompanied Christ's baptism are symbolical of what happened at our Baptism. At Christ's baptism the Holy Spirit descended upon Him; at our Baptism the Trinity

took its abode in our soul. At His baptism Christ was proclaimed the "Beloved Son" of the Father; at our Baptism we become the adopted sons and daughters of God. At Christ's baptism the heavens were opened; at our Baptism heaven was opened to us. At His baptism Jesus prayed; after our Baptism we must pray to avoid actual sin.

History of the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

The Baptism of the Lord has historically been associated with the celebration of Epiphany. Even today, the Eastern Christian feast of Theophany, celebrated on January 6 as a counterpart to the Western feast of Epiphany, focuses primarily on the Baptism of the Lord as the revelation of God to man.

After the Nativity of Christ (Christmas) was separated out from Epiphany, the Church in the West continued the process and dedicated a celebration to each of the major epiphanies (revelations) or theophanies (the revelation of God to man): the Birth of Christ at Christmas, which revealed Christ to Israel; the revelation of Christ to the Gentiles, in the visit of the Wise Men at Epiphany; the Baptism of the Lord, which revealed the Trinity; and the miracle at the wedding at Cana, which revealed Christ's transformation of the world.

Thus, the Baptism of the Lord began to be celebrated on the octave (eighth day) of Epiphany, with the miracle at Cana celebrated on the Sunday after that. In the current liturgical calendar, the Baptism of the Lord is celebrated on the Sunday after January 6, and, a week later, on the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time, we hear the Gospel of the Wedding at Cana.

The Meaning Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

The mystery of Christ's baptism in the Jordan by St John, the Precursor, proposes the contemplation of an already adult Jesus. This mystery is infinitely linked to the Solemnities of the Lord's birth and the Epiphany that we have just celebrated, as in some ways it takes up and represents their significance to us.

At Christmas we have contemplated the human birth of the Word incarnate by the Virgin Mary. In the 4th century, the Fathers of the Church deepened the understanding of the faith with regard to the Christmas mystery in the light of Jesus' Humanity. They spoke of the Incarnation of the Word already working like the 'Christification' of that humanity that He had assumed from His mother. Or put in simpler terms: Jesus is the Christ from the first instant of conception in Mary's spotless womb because He Himself, with His Divine Power, consecrated, anointed and 'Christified' that human nature with which He became incarnate.

In the mystery of the Epiphany, we then meditated on Christ's manifestation to all nations that was represented by the Magi, the wise men from the East, who came to adore the Child.

Now, in the mystery of Christ's Baptism in the Jordan River, we again encounter and represent the truth of the Lord's incarnation and His manifestation as the Christ. Jesus' Baptism is in fact His definitive manifestation as the Messiah or Christ to Israel, and as the Son of the Father to the entire world. Here we find the dimension of the Epiphany which was His manifestation to all nations. The Father's voice from heaven shows that Jesus of Nazareth is the eternal Son and the descent of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove shows the Trinitarian nature of the Christian God. The true and unique God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, shows Himself in Christ, through Him, with Him and in Him.

The Baptism in the Jordan returns to the great Christmas theme of 'Christification,' Jesus of Nazareth's spiritual anointing, His presentation as the Anointed One par excellence, the Messiah or the One sent by the Father for the salvation of mankind. The Spirit that descended on Jesus shows and seals in an incontrovertible way the 'Christification' of Jesus' humanity that the Word had already fulfilled from the first moment of His miraculous conception by Mary. Jesus, from the very beginning, was always the Lord's Christ, He was always God. Yet, His one, true humanity, that which is perfect in every way, as the Gospel records, constantly grew in natural and supernatural perfection. *'And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and with men'* (Lk2:52). In Israel at 30 years of age, one reached full maturity and therefore could become a master. Jesus came of age and the Spirit, descending and remaining on Him, definitively consecrated His whole being as the Christ.

The same Spirit, that descended on the water of the River Jordan wafted over the waters during the first creation (Gen. 1:2). Therefore, the Baptism in the Jordan presents yet another truth: that Jesus has started a new creation. He is the second man (1 Cor. 15:47) or the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), that comes to repair the first Adam's guilt. He does this as the Lamb of God that takes away our sins. *'Looking at the events in light of the Cross and Resurrection, the Christian people realized what happened: Jesus loaded the burden of all mankind's guilt upon His shoulders; He bore it down into the depths of the Jordan. He inaugurated His public activity by stepping into the place of sinners'* (Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth*, Bloomsbury 2007, p 18).

SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM MEANS WHAT FOR US:

Baptism, the foundational sacrament of the Church, is the first of three sacraments of initiation, followed in the usual order by Confirmation and Eucharist. It is the fount from which springs a full and invigorating Christian life and begins the Christian journey. In Christian history and theology, Baptism washes away the onus of original and personal sin, dresses one in Christ's dazzling garment of pure love, oils one for the work of building the kingdom of justice and peace, and inserts one into the communion of believers stretching through the centuries. It is at once transforming, purifying, reconciling and uniting.

Although most Catholic Christians continue to experience this sacrament as infants, Baptism presupposes a journey of faith prior to its celebration on the part of the participant. Such a journey is provided in most instances of adult baptism through the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) or with children over the age of reason by the similar Rite of Christian Initiation for Children.

For infants and younger children, parents provide the context of the Christian journey. Thus during the preparation for the sacrament and during its celebration, parents (and godparents) review and renew in a solemn manner their own Baptismal promises, that they may immerse their children in the faith of the Church and its practice through their own spiritual journeys.

Drawing these themes together, Baptism is most fundamentally a participation in the Paschal Mystery, a movement from death to life, which is the ongoing experience and vision of everyone who follows Christ. Therefore it is most fitting and preferred that every candidate for Baptism be immersed in the living waters, to reveal starkly the transformation that occurs in this sacrament. The one baptized is truly now risen with Christ and lives with Christ and in Christ must remain so into eternal life.

What is Our History?

When we think about the biblical origins of the sacrament of Baptism, most of us start with John the Baptist. In reality we now know that a variety of ritual acts existed in the time of the Old Testament, which provided a rich pool of symbols, rituals and practices from which the Christian community later drew. Let us briefly touch on a few of the more significant ones. We know that for the Hebrews, a people living in a parched land, water was a powerful symbol of life. Because it was basic to cleansing, it was often used in the Hebrew rites of purification. The Hebrews did not think in terms of a body/soul split; physical purification rites like washing of hands or the cleansing of sacred utensils were also understood as a sign of an interior purification if performed in the right attitude.

In late Judaism (after about 100 BC) we can identify a “baptism” movement consisting of a variety of sects which employed frequent ritual baths as a means of preparing for the imminent Day of the Lord. At this time we find indications of the practice of “proselyte baptism”. Gentiles, as such, were considered impure and therefore needed to undergo a ritual purification. For males this was followed by circumcision as the essential part of their initiation into God’s chosen people. Following the “baptism” and circumcision the convert sometimes performed a ritual sacrifice, signifying full participation in the liturgy and worship of the community. This may have influenced the later practices of sharing in the Eucharist as a part of Christian initiation.

John the Baptizer obviously drew from much of this tradition in his own ministry. John’s basic message was one of repentance and conversion in preparation for the coming Messianic Kingdom. For those who heard John, his baptism provided a concrete sign of their acceptance of his preaching. It is a firm gospel tradition that it was John’s baptism of Jesus that marked the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. Most scholars see this key event as a proclamation that the Kingdom for which John was the herald had indeed arrived in the person of Jesus.

Even though Sacred Scripture indicates that Jesus and his disciples baptized (John 3, 22), baptizing did not play a major part in Jesus’ own earthly ministry. What is significant however, is the biblical evidence that it quickly became a central ritual of the Christian community almost immediately following Jesus’ death. In fact, the two key historical events that were most formative in the church’s understanding of Christian initiation were Jesus’ death and resurrection and the coming of the Spirit. The earliest rites of initiation, water baptism by submersion and the laying on of hands, together sacramentalized these two historical events in one act of initiation. The convert’s public assent of faith marked the entrance into the Paschal Mystery and experience of the Spirit. In the sacrament of Baptism this action is what was celebrated by the convert and community. Meaningful faith could not be private, it was public and it was communal. Baptism celebrated this reality.

It is important that we are able to see this early development of Baptism in its proper context. It clearly was an expression of the life of the Church. It was a sacrament of initiation. As the church grew and developed in its first few centuries, the process of initiation also expanded to include what we refer to now as the Catechumenate, a faith journey undertaken by both candidate (catechumen) and community. This journey often spanning years clearly demonstrated that initiation was a process. Early in Church practice the Baptism of a convert (by this time a rich rite including the imposition of hands and an anointing) was immediately followed by the celebration of the Eucharist, the principal worship of the Church. Since Baptism

was obviously associated with conversion, it was therefore administered primarily to adults for the first two or three centuries. When whole households were converted, and received into the Church, children were included in this rite.

The main factor encouraging the delay of Baptism was the harsh penitential discipline of the early Church. In the Church's thinking of that time one had only two chances to receive the sacramental sign of forgiveness: Baptism and the reception of Penance after Baptism. It was in the fourth and fifth centuries that Baptism underwent some of the most dramatic changes as a result of a curious blend of theological insight and historical circumstance. As was mentioned earlier, Baptism was understood as a sacrament of adult conversion. The convert celebrated reconciliation with God and liberation from sin. It was St. Augustine, however, who emphasized the notion of baptismal liberation from sin and took the understanding of the Sacrament in a new direction. As an ardent foe of Pelagianism, a heresy which held that humanity could attain salvation unaided by grace, Augustine emphasized the reality of original sin and the resulting necessity for the grace of baptismal cleansing. Prior to this the people had little reason to fear for the salvation of their unbaptized children. With this new theology and given the high rate of infant mortality, parents began to appeal to their bishop for the immediate baptism of their children. By the fifth century infant baptism had become the common practice. It should also be remembered that by this time the empire had become predominantly Christian. Adult conversion and baptism was de-emphasized because there were few unbaptized adults left.

The role of the bishop in the Sacraments of Initiation was very important. In the first few centuries of the Church he was the primary minister of the Rite of Initiation which included Baptism, Confirmation, and the reception of Eucharist. Yet by the fourth and fifth centuries the Church had grown to such an extent that he was unable to visit each community as frequently as in times past. This created an issue that was solved pastorally in different ways by the East and West. In the West bishops began to delegate to the presbyters the authority to baptize, while reserving to themselves the second element in the initiation process, the imposition of hands and anointing, which became Confirmation as a separate sacrament. In the East the decision was made to maintain the unity of the initiation rites thus making the presbyter the primary minister. The practice of baptizing, confirming and administering Eucharist in one ceremony together at infancy has continued from that time to the present in the Eastern Church.

In both East and West infant baptism remained the most common practice. This is not without its wisdom. While the Church has distanced itself from the medieval preoccupation with original sin and the salvation of the unbaptized, infant baptism still provides a powerful reminder that the pilgrimage of faith is truly life-long. Furthermore, we are reminded that it is God who takes the initiative in salvation and offers his grace to all human beings. The community, for its part, wishes to begin its nurturing of faith as early as possible in the child's life. One way of nurturing the faith of a child was the practice in the church to give the child the name of a saint who was to be the patron and model for the Christian all through life. While infant baptism is the most common practice in the Church today, the new Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, restored at the Second Vatican Council, offers us a more ancient vision. It reminds us of the biblical connection between personal conversion and communal

initiation. It also restores the ancient unity of the three presently distinct Sacraments of Initiation - Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

By maintaining the validity of infant baptism while at the same time pointing to the vision of the adult catechumenate, the Church powerfully communicates the degree to which initiation should be viewed as a lifelong process worthy of such diverse sacramental expression.

ICON AT THE DOOR THE BAPTISM of CHRIST

Commemoration of the Baptism of Christ is an ancient tradition in the church. Icons for each major feast day in the Liturgical Calendar have been produced since the earliest days of the Byzantine era. The image used in this version follows closely the ancient prototypes. This event is described in all four Gospels (Mt. 3:13-17, Mk. 1:9-11, Lk. 3:21-22 and Jn. 1:29-34). The Baptism of Christ has two aspects of great importance to all Christians. First, it was the occasion on which the Trinity was revealed to us. The Spirit descended from Heaven like a dove, the Son bowed His head in submission to receive the water from John the Baptist, and the voice of the Father spoke: "This is My Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 3:17). Second, while performing the act of ritual cleansing prescribed by Jewish ritual. Christ established the New Testament sacrament of Baptism as a sign of membership in His church. John the Baptist officiates at the ceremony, his right hand upon Jesus' head and his left raised in prayer. An Orthodox hymn expresses what John may have felt. "...I do not dare to hold Thy most pure head, sanctify Thou me. O Lord, by Thy divine manifestation." John is dressed in camel skins (Mt. 1:6) but also wears a red robe symbolic of his priestly role in the scene. Christ stands in the midst of the Jordan, head bowed in submission, right hand extended in the ancient gesture of blessing, index finger extended, middle and little fingers curved, ring finger and thumb crossed forming "ICXC", the Greek monogram of Jesus Christ. A white cloth girds His loins, white becoming from this moment the symbol of membership in His church. His halo, iconographic symbol of sanctity, is inscribed with a cross and the Greek letters omega, omicron, and mu. They spell "ho on", which translates as "Who Am", the words used to name God in Exodus 3:14.

The waters of the Jordan appear dark and threatening. To the ancient Jews, water was a symbol of death. Jesus immerses Himself in the water as a sign of His death and burial (Ro. 6:3). The blessing of His hand is conferred on the water, transforming it into a symbol of birth into the new life of Christ. Two spirits are visible in the water, the male on the right is an allegory of the Jordan while the female on the left represents the Red Sea. These remind us of two Old Testament prefiguration of baptism, a passing through water into new life, the dividing of the Jordan by Elishia (2 Kg. 2:14) and dividing of the Red Sea by Moses (Ex. 14:16-21). The Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove, recalling another Old Testament story. Noah's dove appeared to announce the end of the Flood and the return of life to the world (Gn. 8:11). Here, the Holy Spirit announces the remission of sins and God's mercy toward His people. These angels stand on the right bank, hands covered by their robes in the ancient Byzantine mark of special respect. They are absent in the Gospel stories of the Baptism, although in each Gospel account, the Baptism is followed by the Temptation in the Desert, and angels minister to Jesus at the conclusion of the forty days (Mt. 4:11). By their postures they help focus the viewer's attention on Christ.

UP-COMING SCHEDULE

Saturday 12 Jan Mass 8:30 a.m.
First Reconciliation Prayer Service 10:00 a.m.
Confessions 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.
Vigil Mass for Baptism of the Lord 5:00 p.m.
Cursillo team retreat Adoration

Sunday 13 Jan Masses 7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m. 11:30 a.m. 5:00 p.m. 7:00 p.m. Brig
(8:30 Mass KoC)

Monday 14 Jan Day Off
Mass 8:30 a.m.
Brig 7:40 p.m.

Tuesday 15 Jan Mass 8:30 a.m.
Mass Georgian Manor 10:00 a.m.

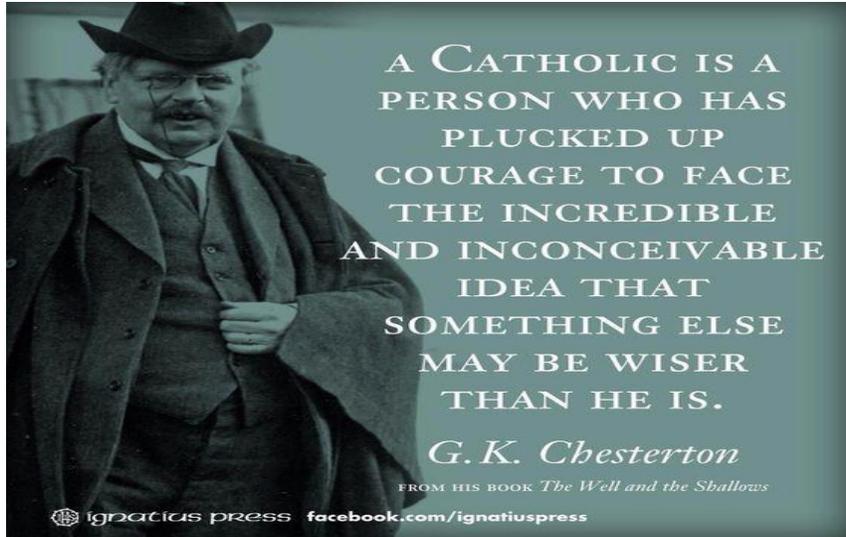
Wednesday 16 Jan Mass 6:30 a.m. 8:30 a.m.
Confessions 7:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.
PCRS Mass 10:00 a.m.
Indian Creek Correctional Facility 5:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Thursday 17 Jan Mass 8:30 a.m.
Confessions 5:00 p.m.
Mass 6:30 p.m.
RCIA

Friday 18 Jan Mass 8:30 a.m.
Spiritual Direction 11:00 –
KoC Adoration/Benediction for Life 6:30 p.m.
Mass 7:30 p.m.

Saturday 19 Jan Mass 8:30 a.m.
First Reconciliation Prayer Service 10:00 a.m. – 12 Noon
Confessions 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.
Vigil Mass 2nd Sunday Ordinary time 5:00 p.m.

Sunday 13 Jan 2nd Sunday Ordinary Time
Masses 7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m.
Youth Benediction & Adoration Confessions

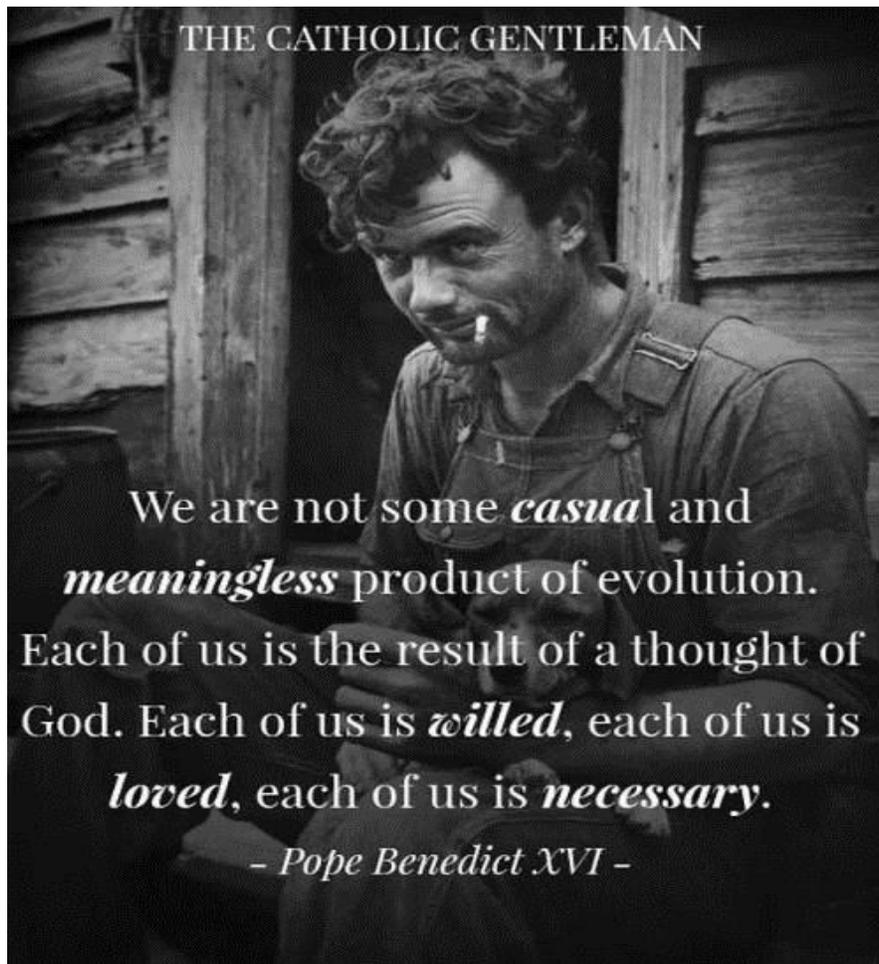


A CATHOLIC IS A
PERSON WHO HAS
PLUCKED UP
COURAGE TO FACE
THE INCREDIBLE
AND INCONCEIVABLE
IDEA THAT
SOMETHING ELSE
MAY BE WISER
THAN HE IS.

G. K. Chesterton

FROM HIS BOOK *The Well and the Shallows*

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THE CATHOLIC GENTLEMAN

We are not some *casual* and
meaningless product of evolution.
Each of us is the result of a thought of
God. Each of us is *willed*, each of us is
loved, each of us is *necessary*.

- Pope Benedict XVI -