



REFLECTION

John's baptism with water has received its full meaning through the Baptism of Jesus' own life and death. To accept the invitation to be baptized now means to go to the place of Jesus' Baptism. It is to go where He identifies Himself with us and to receive there our identification with Him. The point where He anticipates death has now become the point where we anticipate rising again with Him.

(From *Jesus of Nazareth* by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI)

STEWARDSHIP: Our Baptism, like the Lord's, is a consecration to service. The bishop's pastoral on stewardship reminds us that "...there is a fundamental obligation arising from the

Sacrament of Baptism that people place their gifts, their resources – their selves – at God’s service in and through the Church.”

Raymond E. Brown, SJ

“The day when a person is baptized is more important than the day when a person is ordained priest and bishop.”

HISTORY OF THE FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

This feast’s history really begins in 1970 when it was chosen as the last moment of the Christmas cycle. It has no conceptual link with Christmas; except it could be argued that in the eastern rites as stated last week in the sermon, that it is part of Epiphany as is the Wedding Feast of Cana and so could be seen as an extension of Epiphany (and it is so linked in the current western Liturgy of the Hours). However, that is not how it is presented in the Eucharistic liturgy where it is celebrated as a distinct ‘event’ in the life of Jesus. So how should we approach this feast?

First, it is now approaching mid-January and for everyone in the congregation, the presider included, Christmas is rapidly drifting into memory, most people have returned to work and normal routines for several weeks now, schools have re-opened, and our attention is increasingly directed to the next holiday or Spring Break. Even our talk of the New Year and resolutions made seem a bit dated and fuzzy. So looking back to Christmas or referring to this as the close of the Christmas Season for the Church is just additional information that clouds our thinking or is simply ignored.

Second, this is about the baptism of the Christ by John, it is not a celebration of baptism as a sacrament or even the concept of baptism within the Paschal Mystery. Such thoughts belong to Easter, and the Easter Vigil in particular, not to this particular feast. So this is not a day for having a baptism during the Eucharist. Such a celebration just confuses the understanding of what is being recalled and clouds the understanding. Indeed, if it is the community’s practice to celebrate the baptism of new members of the gathering during the Eucharist, then this is one of those Sundays which should not be used for baptisms.

Third, when we look at the position of the baptism of Jesus with the gospel kerugma (preaching the gospel of Christ) we note that it is the public announcement of the beginning of the work of the Messiah. It marks a beginning of a period, not a conclusion. The basic structure can be seen in Mark, after the opening of the gospel comes the work of John which comes to its conclusion in his baptism of Jesus and the glorious theophany of approbation: ‘Thou art my beloved Son: with Thee I am well pleased’ (Mk. 1:1-11). The other synoptics maintain this structure except that they add the prelude of the Infancy Narratives; while in Jn. 1:29-34 the testimony of John the Baptist concluded by his reference to the theophany of the Spirit descending on Jesus like a dove. In all the gospels, this ‘event’ is then followed by the messianic ministry (what we often refer to as the ‘public life’). So the baptism of the Lord by John had a distinct place in the preaching of the Church, it marked the ‘visible’ anointing by the Father in the Spirit for his work. It is the great beginning.

Fourth, the baptism of Jesus now has a definite place in the liturgy of the Church, it is now a moment in our common memory and celebration of the Lord. So it would be appropriate to

look on it as the beginning of Ordinary Time, and, in particular, a celebration of Jesus as ‘the Messiah,’ the anointed one,’ ‘the Christ.’ So the tone of this time is that of beginnings, not of conclusions.

READINGS FOR SECOND SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

19 JAN ‘20

Readings for the Diocesan Bicentennial Mass

Isa: 60:1-6: The light of the Lord’s glory shines out and draws people from all over the world: they come to worship and to praise the Lord.

Acts 2:42-47: The author describes the growth of the community of believers in numbers, in their sense of communal spirit and in their spiritual maturity.

Mt. 18:15-20: Matthew reminds his community that where two or more join together in prayer that Jesus is in their midst.

Actual readings for the Second Sunday

Isa. 49:3, 5-6: We hear the voice of a prophet who is unsure of himself, but who discovers that the plans which God is working out in his life are much greater than he ever understood.

1 Cor. 1:1-3: In this short greeting Paul reminds the Christians of Corinth of something very special: that we are all equally called to take our place among the saints in Christ.

Jn. 1:29-34: Although John the Baptist twice confesses that he did not know Jesus as the Messiah, nonetheless now, thanks to the spiritual experience of Jesus’ baptism, he can confidently assure his listeners that Jesus is ‘the Chosen One of God.’

Teilhard de Chardin

“The most satisfying thing in life is to have been able to give a large part of oneself to others.”

DIOCESE OF RICHMOND BICENTENIAL

Beginning next weekend, 18-19 Jan. the Diocese will initiate a year long observance of its 200 year history. The official beginning will be observed with a Regional Mass to be celebrated at Sacred Heart Church in Norfolk at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday Jan. 18. The Mass is celebrated in Norfolk in recognition of the formal establishment in the Commonwealth of a Catholic presence in the Eastern Vicariate and to commemorate the arrival from Ireland of the first Bishop of Richmond, Patrick Kelly. All are invited to attend this Mass.

Also on that weekend, 18-19 Jan., every parish throughout the Diocese will use a special Mass setting, special readings, a particular intercession petition, the Diocesan Bicentennial prayer and Bicentennial hymn. This Mass will be celebrated at every Eucharistic Liturgy that weekend here at St. Stephen, Martyr.

ICON: THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST (*located at entrance of the church*)

Origin 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, although it is unusually tall and narrow, adjusted to fit the space needs of the church that

commissioned the original. The Baptism of Christ is described in all four Gospels (Mt. 3:13-17, Mk. 1:9-11, Lk. 3:21-22, and Jn. 1:29-34).

Theology & Symbolism 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 nu. 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 pre-figurations of baptism, a passing through water into new life; the dividing of the Jordan by Elisha (2 Kg. 2:14) and the 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 (Gen. 8:11). Here, the Holy spirit announces the remission of sins and God's mercy toward His people. Three 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 (e.g. Mt. 4:11). By their postures they help focus the viewer's attention on Christ.

SAINT OF THE WEEK: AELRED OF RIEVAULX (1109-1167) 12 JAN

Abbot, homilist, and historian also called Aelred, Aethelred, or Ethelred. He was born in Hexham, England, the son of a married priest, he was educated at Durham. In 1130 he joined the household of David I, king of Scotland (r. 1124-1153), and became his seneschal. In 1134 he became a monk at the recently founded abbey of Rievaulx, where Bernard of Clairvaux had appointed his secretary William over who formed the community. In spite of delicate health, Aelred followed the austere regime and became so esteemed in his community that he was

chosen as envoy to Rome in 1142 over the disputed election of William of York and soon afterwards, as master of novices. In 1143 he was appointed abbot of Revesby, and only four years later, he was recalled to be abbot of Rievaulx and superior of all Cistercians in all of England.

Under his rule the abbey of Rievaulx prospered exceedingly; it increased in numbers to 150 choir monks and 500 lay brothers (the largest of its time in England); it also made five foundations in England and Scotland.

Aelred's sensitive discretion and gentle holiness, with its strong emphasis on charity, inspired by the writings of Sts. John and Augustine, humanized the intransigence of the Cistercian monasticism and attracted men of similar character to his own. Through his many friends as well as his writings he became a figure of national importance. He was involved with King Henry II of England (r. 1154-1189), persuading the ruler to meet with France's Louis VII (r. 1137-1180) and Pope Alexander III (r. 1159-1181) in 1162., chosen to preach at Westminster Abbey for the Translation (reburial) of Edward the Confessor in 1163. This led to his writing a Life of Edward (he had already written on Ninian and on the saints of Hexham); other more characteristic writing included a treatise on Friendship, the *Speculum Caritatis*, and Sermons on Isaiah, often considered his finest work. A treatise on the human soul was left unfinished. In the following year, 1164 he went to the Picts in Galloway, converting many.

Long enduring physical infirmities, Aelred maintained an austere and active life, described by his contemporaries as looking "more like a ghost than a man." In his sermons he was so eloquent that he earned the title "the Bernard of England," because his treatises and letters revealed the same theological soundness and beauty of style as Bernard of Clairvaux.

He died at Rievaulx on 12 January 1166 or 1167 and was buried in the Chapter House. Later his relics were translated to the church. In spite of the vivid and convincing portrait of his by Walter Daniel, his friend and disciple, Aelred was never formally canonized. There was, however, a local cult, which was approved by the Cistercians, who promulgated his feast in 1476.

Incorporation into Christ, which is brought about by Baptism, is constantly renewed and consolidated by sharing in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, especially by that full sharing which takes place in sacramental communion. We can say not only that each of us receives Christ, but also that Christ receives each of us. –Pope St. John Paul II




The Lord was Baptized, not to be cleansed Himself, but to cleanse the waters, so that those waters, cleansed by the flesh of Christ which knew no sin, might have the power of Baptism.

St. Ambrose of Milan

“Baptize first the children; and if they can speak for themselves, let them do so. Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them.”

St. Hippolytus of Rome (“The Apostolic Tradition,” 215 A.D.)



IF YOU DO
NOT **LIVE**
WHAT YOU
BELIEVE,
YOU WILL
END UP
BELIEVING
WHAT YOU
LIVE.

ARCHBISHOP FULTON J. SHEEN
Quoted by Fr. Andrew Apostoli in the book, *What to Do When Jesus Is Hungry*
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