The Baptism of the Lord (C)

Gospel text (*Lk* 3:15-16.21-22): The people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, “I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

The Baptism: participation in Jesus’ world-transforming struggle

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Today, through his baptism, Jesus, anticipates His own death on the cross ("disappearing" beneath the waters of the Jordan), at the same time that He also anticipates His resurrection ("emerging" from the same waters). It is a symbolism that refers back to reality: Jesus Christ will really enter into the sin of others descending into the “Inferno”, into the house of the evil one. But He does not descend merely in the role of a spectator, as in Dante’s Inferno. Rather, He goes down in the role of one whose suffering-with-others is a transforming suffering that turns the underworld around, knocking down and flinging open the gates of the abyss.

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.

—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.