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.”

After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

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Fr. Joan BUSQUETS i Masana
(Sabadell, Barcelona, Spain)

Today, we look at an adult Jesus. The child of the manger has grown to manhood and respectability, and reaches that place in life when He must embark on the Divine commission entrusted to Him by the Father. In preparation, He joins the candidates who have responded to John the Baptist in the Jordan River, submitting to baptism at his hands to wash away their sins.

It is at that time and place that God reveals Him as His Son: “and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Lk 3:21-22). It is just the preparatory stage of the Great Journey He is prepared to start off all the way to the Cross. It is the first public act of His ministry, and marks the divine manifestation of Him to the world as the promised Messiah.

His baptism is also the prologue to his life, demonstrating that He has chosen to be obedient to the will of His Father: a sign that He will not be an agitator, nor a rabble-rouser, but He will be gentle, peaceful, and calm. He will not even break a bruised reed, but he will rule with justice. He will open the eyes of the blind, and free the captives. The signs by which the Messiah will be known, as described by Isaiah, will be fulfilled in Him, and we stand blessed by Him, as we read today in Saint Paul's letter: “our savior appeared, not because of any righteous deeds we had done but because of his mercy, he saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life” (Tit 3:5-7).

The feast of the Baptism of our Lord serves to remind us of our own Baptisms, compelling us to renew the promises our parents and godparents made on our behalf, when they presented us to the Church, to make of us disciples of Jesus. “Baptism has liberated us from all evil, which are the sins, but with God’s grace we have to accomplish all good things” (Saint Caesarius, bishop of Arles).

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “Christian, acknowledge your dignity, and becoming a partner in the Divine nature, refuse to return to the old baseness by degenerate conduct (...). Your purchase money is the blood of Christ.” (Saint Leo the Great)

- “In Baptism we are consecrated by the Holy Spirit. This is what the word “Christian” means, it means consecrated like Jesus, in the same Spirit. If you want your children to become true Christians, help them to grow in the warmth of the love of God, in the light of his Word.” (Francis)

- “Through Baptism the Christian is sacramentally assimilated to Jesus, who in his own baptism anticipates his death and resurrection. The Christian must enter into this mystery of humble self-abasement and repentance, go down into the water with Jesus in order to rise with him, be reborn of water and the Spirit so as to become the Father's beloved son in the Son and ‘walk in newness of life’ (Rom 6:4) (...).” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 537)