

Homily
Baptism of Jesus C
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St. Bernard Church
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BAPTISM AND THE ESSENTIALS OF THE CATHOLIC FAITH

We all know that as followers of Christ, our basic, fundamental task is to model our own lives after Jesus, to try our best to live as He did.

So if Jesus, who is God, thought it was important and necessary for Himself to be baptized, Baptism should certainly seem necessary and important for us, who are far, far less perfect than Jesus.

If Baptism is so important and so necessary, then why is it so easy, so common for us to take our Baptisms for granted?

I know I have taken my Baptism for granted for much of my adult life, and I wouldn't be surprised if I have plenty of company.

So let's take a few moments this [evening][morning] to reflect on the significance of Baptism for each of us.

Through Baptism, we are grafted onto, incorporated into, the Body of Christ. To appreciate our Baptism, then, we have to understand the fundamental identity and mission of Jesus and how His identity and mission impact our lives.

As is evident from Jesus' own Baptism, God the Father loved His Son. In today's Gospel, we heard this beautiful expression of love from the Father to Jesus: "You are my beloved Son; with You I am well pleased." Imagine God expressing those same words to each of us.

When we become linked to Jesus through our Baptism, then we participate in the love relationship between God the Father and Jesus. Through our faith in Jesus and our obedience to Him, we can experience the personal love of the Father.

God created every human being for a loving relationship with Him. This relationship, however, is broken and obstructed through our sins and the sinfulness of humanity.

The role of Jesus is to restore this relationship with the Father to what it was intended to be.

By Jesus' sufferings and death, He atones for all of our sins. He opens the gates of heaven to all of us, who, no matter how well we live, are unworthy to enter.

Beyond even that, Jesus makes it possible for every human being to share in His divine life, the life He shares with His Father. Through our faith in Jesus Christ, we have access to His supernatural power and grace.

St. Paul wrote in his Letter to the Ephesians of his hope that they would know "the surpassing greatness of God's power for us who believe." After Jesus died, this power was carried on in the Church through its sacraments. Here are 3 quotations from the Catechism about this power:

"Sacraments are 'powers that come forth from the Body of Christ..They are the actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church.'" (1116)

"Celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify...In them, Christ himself is at work; it is he who baptizes, he who acts in the sacraments in order to communicate grace...**As fire transforms into itself everything it touches, so the Holy Spirit transforms into the divine life whatever is subjected to his power.**" (1127)

"From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated...the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it...Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them." (1128)

Whether we experience this power and this grace depends on whether we invite Jesus to be at the center of our lives and on the attitude we have when we participate in the sacraments.

What is required is that we have the humility to surrender our lives to Jesus, to accept Him as our Lord, our Master and our Savior, to give Him complete control over our lives: our thoughts, our decisions, our actions.

When we surrender our lives to Jesus, when we reclaim our Baptismal promises as we mature as Christians, we discover the true meaning and purpose of our lives. We learn that there is a place in the Body of Christ that was intended by God just for us. Then we try our best, with God's help, to live out that meaning and purpose.

And how does God help us? Just like at the Baptism of Jesus, when we surrender our lives to God, we receive the Holy Spirit. As John says in today's Gospel, we will be baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire. If we strive to fully live out our

Baptism, the Holy Spirit will guide us and give us the fire, the power we need to fulfill God's plan, His design, for our lives.

This all happens through the Catholic Church, the Body of Christ on earth. It's through the Church, through its teachings and the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, that the divine life shared by God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit, becomes available to us who are living 2000 years after Jesus walked the earth.

All of this has its beginning for us in our Baptism.

I didn't really appreciate my Baptism until I was 40 years old. Then, as my appreciation grew, I finally became grateful that my parents arranged for me to be Baptized as an infant.

I became very grateful that my parents were excellent examples of living a full Christian life. And I became very grateful that they raised me in the Catholic Church.

One of the best things I've done in recent years was in 2006. I made a pilgrimage to a small town in Illinois, to go to Mass in the church where I was baptized. At that Mass, I thanked my parents, who had passed away, and thanked God, for my Baptism and for the many blessings which had enriched my life.

Let's pray.

Lord, help me reclaim my Baptism by being humble, by admitting how much I need You in my life.

When I am weak, be my strength.

When I am hurt or sick, bring me Your healing.

When I don't know what to think, give me Your wisdom.

When I don't know what to do, show me the path You want me to take.

Whatever I need, may I look for it and find it in the sacraments of Your Church, and especially in the gift of Your body and blood.

Amen.