

The Baptism of the Lord (B)  
(Isaiah 55:1-11 / Mark 1:7-11)  
11.01.2015  
... *of Jesus*

In 1535, Teresa Sanchez de Cepeda y Ahumada joined the Carmelite convent of Avila, she is now well-known as St Teresa of Avila but in fact she received the religious name of Teresa of Jesus. This name sums up the deep desire of her heart and the whole purpose of her life: to be *of Jesus*, to belong to him and to be with him. In one of her poems, she wrote: “Myself surrendered and given, / The exchange is this: / My Beloved is for me, / And I am for my Beloved” (quoted in *Praying...*, p. 80).

As we commemorate today the Baptism of the Lord, we have to remember that, on the day of our baptism, we became *of Jesus*. According to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council, “by baptism, we are grafted into the paschal mystery of Christ: we die with him, are buried with him, and rise with him” (SC 6); “through baptism we are formed in the likeness of Christ” (LG 7).

While it is our baptism which gives us our identity and our name, in our daily lives, when it comes to define who we are, we like to add names, titles and adjectives which are supposed to encapsulate all that seems important to us: we are *conservative* Catholics, *traditional* Catholics, *liberal* Catholics, we are *Free* Presbyterians, *Reformed* Presbyterians, *Non-Subscribing* Presbyterians... in Newry we even have the *Dominican* Catholics and the *Cathedral* Catholics!

We are not going to discuss the legitimacy of those appellations, however it is important to keep in mind that we should not let them obscure the fact that ultimately, like St Teresa, we are *of Jesus*. Before we feel necessary to add any names or precisions, we bear the name of Christ, we are Christians. St Paul’s words to the Corinthians are still relevant for us: “What I mean is that each of you says, ‘I belong to Paul’, or ‘I belong to Apollos’, or ‘I belong to Cephas’ (...). Were you baptized in the name of Paul? (...) Whether Paul, Apollos or Cephas (...), you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God” (1Co 1:12-13, 3:22-23).

Since as Catholics we recognise the validity of the baptism performed in other denominations, we have to conclude that with Orthodox Christians and Protestants throughout the world, and particularly those with whom we live, we are together *of Jesus*.

Whether we are Catholics or Presbyterians, Orthodox or Anglicans, we all belong to Christ. Our common belonging to Christ does not deny the reality of our divisions and the fact that there are disagreements and differences, yet our belonging to Christ is the starting point of our journey in faith. Whether we like it or not, we are all of the same and one family *of Jesus*.

Twenty years ago, St John Paul II felt the need to reaffirm “that acknowledging our brotherhood (with Christians from other denominations) is not the consequence of a large-hearted philanthropy or a vague family spirit. It is rooted in recognition of the oneness of Baptism (...). This is something much more than an act of ecumenical courtesy; it constitutes a basic ecclesiological statement” (UUS 42).

It is important for all of us to go beyond ecumenical courtesy and well worded statements and to really live what we say we believe. If because of our baptism we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, then we must learn to relate to one another in a way which is in accord with our baptism and our fidelity to Jesus.

The Scriptures have a lot to say to us about relationships in families. Sometimes, within the Catholic Church and in our relationships with our brothers and sisters from other

denominations, we answer like Cain after Abel's murder: "I don't know about my brother. Am I supposed to take care of my brother?" (Gn 4:9 GNB).

We may not go as far as Cain and physically kill a brother or a sister, but we may verbally assassinate, hurt or ostracise a brother or a sister who thinks differently, who sees things from another angle; we may close off all forms of communication with or simply refuse to acknowledge the presence and the contribution of a brother or a sister who challenges us.

The problem is that we cannot be *of Jesus* on an individual basis, we cannot pick and choose those we want as brothers and sisters. All those who are baptised are given to us as members of the one family of Jesus.

The whole chapter 3 of the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of St John could illustrate what has just been said. Let us quote a few verses: "Whoever does not love his brother is not from God. (...) Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer (...). This is the proof of love, that he laid down his life for us, and we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (v. 10.15.16).

Those are quite strong words! They are rooted in the deep conviction that our belonging to Christ entails our belonging to one another.

In the porch of this church, we can read St Paul's words "One Lord, One faith, One Baptism". They are not just a nice architectural feature, they remind us of our responsibility and our duty to care for all those who are one with us through baptism.

In his encyclical letter entitled *God is Love*, Pope emeritus Benedict XVI warns us that to close "our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God" (n. 16). May we all remember that through our baptism we have been enlightened by Christ to see and to love God in all our brothers and sisters.