

The Baptism of the Lord (A)
(Isaiah 42:1-4.6-7 / Matthew 3:13-17)
12.01.2014

Dear brothers and sisters,

Today we celebrate the feast of the baptism of the Lord Jesus by Saint John the Baptist in the River Jordan. The baptism of the Lord, together with the magi who guided by a star came from afar to pay homage to the Lord, and the wedding at Cana where Jesus changed the water into wine, are the first three epiphanies or manifestations of the Lord to the nations. The liturgy calls them also the 'three wonders' or the 'three miracles'.

In the narrative of the baptism of the Lord, we see Jesus who comes to be baptised by John. John was conferring a baptism of repentance for sinners in order to prepare these people to welcome the Messiah. So when he sees Jesus coming for baptism, John tries to dissuade Him because Jesus is the Messiah and he is without sin. But Jesus, a name which means Saviour, insists that he be baptised by John. He wants to be baptised because he wants to manifest **his solidarity with those he comes to save**. He is the Son of God, God himself, but at the same time he is a human being, like all other human beings, similar to them in everyway but sin. Jesus has to assume our humanity fully in order to be able to save humankind totally. He can bring salvation only to those with whom he shares fully their human condition.

In Jesus' behaviour, there is a lesson for all of us who on the day of our baptism received the mission to bear witness to Jesus. We cannot bear witness to Jesus by beaming out messages to others from our ivory tower. We have to join people wherever they are in life. We have to know them and speak their language. We have to understand them and love them. We are called to live in **real solidarity** with all those to whom we want to bear witness to Christ. Pope Francis speaking of the priests uses a suggestive image: "they must be living with the smell of the sheep". What is fitting for priests or ministers is also true for each one of us.

"As soon as Jesus was baptised he came up from the water, and suddenly the heavens opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on him". The Spirit which hovered over the waters at the first creation now appears at the beginning of the new creation. The Spirit anoints Jesus for his messianic mission. By the Spirit's descent upon him, Jesus is confirmed in his mission. We have to understand that Jesus was the Son of God, God himself. But he was also a man. He had an intuition of who he was, but being really a man, he had to grow in his self-awareness and be confirmed in his identity and his mission. This is precisely what happened at his baptism. We also need to be confirmed in our vocation and our mission. We need to be confirmed by God in prayer but also by one another. We have to confirm one another. **Here too, there is solidarity between us** which we are called to live: we need one another; we need others and others need us. We are so short-sighted when we cut ourselves off and live only by ourselves.

We read how a voice spoke from heaven: “This is my Son, the beloved; my favour rests on him”. In Mark’s gospel, the vision of the dove and the voice from heaven was understood as an interior personal experience of Jesus: “**You are** my Son...” In Matthew’s gospel, it is a public scene. The voice is addressed to the bystanders in order to confirm their faith: “**This is** my Son”.

We are among the bystanders. Our faith in Jesus is confirmed by the heavenly voice. He is really the Son of God.

More than that, on the day of our baptism, we were incorporated into Christ. We became one with Him. In Jesus, the beloved Son of God, we are adoptive sons and daughters of the Father. We are his beloved sons and daughters. His favour rests on us. We know that, but it is good to hear it again. We all crave to be loved. The awareness of the love of God is the real source of our joy and peace for us.

We have a Father who speaks to us and to whom we can speak, a Father who listens to us, a Father with whom we can share all that we have in our hearts: our worries, all that we don’t understand, all that fills us with fear, and also all our legitimate needs.

We are loved by our heavenly Father as we are. We no longer have to dream of being different from the person we are in order to be loved or happy. Our heavenly Father may not like our sins but he certainly loves the people we are. Even our sins, he looks upon with compassion. He treats us with mercy and forgiveness if we repent of our sins.

We all suffer from loneliness, but there is always someone beside us ready to walk the path of life with us. Very often we live looking out from the window of our hearts... we look all around us for someone who is living and loving within us.

This is the grace of our baptism: Christ’s indwelling! It is good to remember this as we recall Jesus’ baptism and listen to our heavenly Father. May we hear Him saying to each one of us over and over again: You are my son; you are my daughter, my beloved. My favour rests on you. May this certitude of faith bring us hope, peace and joy! May we come back to it again and again so that we may be continually reborn!