The Baptism of the Lord, Year B

GOSPEL

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In the course of his preaching, John the Baptist said:

"Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you the Holy Spirit."

It was at this time when Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised in the Jordan by John. No sooner had he come up out of the water than he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit, like a dove, descending on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests in you."

(Mark 1: 7-11)

DID YOU KNOW?

Points of interest and Catholic lore

- The word 'baptism' comes from the Greek word meaning to plunge or immerse.
- In the early church, baptismal fonts were often small, deep pools where the catechumens descended steps to be fully immersed in the water. They then ascended the steps to symbolise the emerging from the tomb into a new life with Christ.
- • In ancient times, the Jordan River was the border that separated the land of Israel from its eastern neighbours. It was the last river to cross before the Chosen People entered the Promised Land after their escape from Egypt and their wandering in the desert for forty years.
- Baptism is prefigured in the Old Testament. In Genesis, it is where water is described as the source of life and fruitfulness at the dawn of creation, salvation as Noah shelters in his Ark from the floods and liberation as the people flee from Egypt and cross the Red Sea.

EXPLORING THE WORD

At the beginning of the Gospel of Mark (where this passage is taken from) we see the preparation of John the Baptist, who seeks to prepare the world for the message of conversion and repentance. He was seen to be a great man who attracted many through his preaching. In his humility, however, he draws the focus to the one who is to come, one who is greater than he, ultimately the one for whom he is actually speaking about in his preaching.

As Jesus approaches the Jordan River, the scene would have been one that the observers present would have been familiar with; somebody coming to be immersed into the water and baptised. But as the heavens opened or were 'torn apart' as we read in the gospel, there would have been an instant realisation that this was no ordinary man. For those who were still standing, there may have come to the realisation that this was the one to whom John had been preaching about; the one who was to come had arrived.

- Has there been something that you had been waiting for, materially or spiritually?
- Have there been moments where we have been able to recognise Jesus in our own life?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Opportunities for group discussion and personal prayer

- Spend some time in contemplation, considering what 'a new life in Christ' may mean for you at this time.
- When was the last time you attended a baptism? Who was it for?
- Spend some time each day in prayer considering what the voice from heaven is saying to you.

SHARING THE TRADITION

A closer look at the Scripture of the day, to see how it makes more explicit God's word to us through the teachings of Jesus Christ

Baptism is the gateway to the whole of the Christian life and allows us to participate in the other sacraments of the Church, the visible signs of an invisible reality. Through the water being poured over us, we are cleansed from original sin and are incorporated into the body of the Church. (CCC §1213) As such, the two effects of baptism are the purification from our sins, most notably original sin and the second effect is new birth in the Holy Spirit. (CCC §1262).

- What do you think being incorporated into the body of the Church might mean?
- Explore the meaning of Original Sin.
- Examine the Rite of Baptism for Infants with special emphasis on the prayers and anointing that form part of the rite. How are forgiveness of sin and new birth reflected in the rite?

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES

Like Jesus, every Christian enters the water of baptism. The imagery is that of the tomb – entering the depths and rising again to new life in Christ, filled with the Spirit and acknowledged as sons and daughters of God.

LIVING THE WORD

Practical ideas for connecting the Scripture and daily life, with suggestions for music and environment.

- If it is possible, invite the catechumens to attend an infant baptism in the community. If this is not possible then it would be good to watch the Cathedral's livestream of the Holy Saturday Mass (Easter Vigil in the Holy Night) as a group.
- Gather at the baptismal font at the church and go through the rite of Baptism for either infants or for adults as a way preparing and explaining the rite in detail.

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