

The Baptism of Jesus, Sunday, 10 January 2021

Scriptures: Isaiah 55:1-11; 1 John 5:1-9; Mark 1:7-11

Homily: Fr. Ken

In today's Gospel, we recall the story. By the banks of the Jordan River, we come upon another face in the crowd. Jesus comes from Galilee, and joins all the other people—and there are thousands—all of Jerusalem—who have come out from the city and from towns and villages, into the wilderness to listen to the prophet, John the Baptist, and to be baptized by him.

In the Gospel story, John the Baptist has called people to renounce their evil ways, and to prepare themselves for the one who is to come, Jesus. By going down into the water, they renounce their sinful life. As they emerge from the river, they are renewed for holiness and ready for the one who is to come.

Jesus joins this crowd of sinners, walks in step with them, and, when his turn comes, goes down into the waters.

John recognizes Jesus as the Holy One, and is initially reluctant to baptize him. But Jesus insists. He is taking on the sins of everyone, of the whole world in fact; and with those sins upon him, he goes down into the water.

Jesus is one of us, and it is because he is not a sinner, that he can share our sins. Sin makes us all strangers to one another, keeping us apart from one another. But the sinless person, Jesus, is the one who is closest of all to us.

With this public act, at the age of 30, Jesus sets out on the road of our redemption. We will be saved through him. He will carry our sins for us. There will come a time when Jesus will say, with urgency, "There is a baptism I must still receive, and how great is my distress till it is over".

The Baptism that began in the River Jordan will come to its fruition on the Cross and in the Resurrection from the dead.

At the Jordan River Jesus hears the words of God affirming and confirming him in his true identity as he beloved son of God.

This powerful affirmation brings to Jesus all the calm confidence of a person who knows who he is. God's spirit is poured into him.

Jesus is able to go out and begin his public life and work. He is fitted for that task by the voice of his God and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

That voice and that Spirit are given to all Christian people. We are a baptized people, and gifts have been given to us. As Isaiah says, "I have made of you a witness to the peoples, a leader and a master of nations".

Such is the calling of each one of us. We may not remember the day of our own Baptism if we were babies; but that does not matter: we are baptized and confirmed people, and God has bestowed gifts upon us. Today is the day to respond to the gifts you have received, God's Holy Spirit dwelling in you.

You are not just a face in the crowd. You are a daughter or a son of God, and God blesses and watches over each and every one of you, each and every day.