

## THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD (2025 - C)

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Now this Feast comes at the very end of the Christmas Season which means that on Monday, Ordinary Time begins again, and our Christmas decorations will be put away for another year.

The feast we celebrate today calls attention to our Lord's baptism, but in so doing, it also calls attention to baptism in general and to our own baptism in particular. Consequently, I would like to say a few words about baptism today.

So the first thing I would like to say is this: Most people don't spend a lot of time thinking about baptism. It's not something that comes up on a regular basis. It's not like something we're looking forward to. It's not like a birthday or an anniversary or Christmas.

It's also not like something we have to do on a routine basis. It's not like grocery shopping or getting the oil changed or washing our clothes.

Also, Baptism is not like some future event we're planning for. It's not like planning for a summer vacation, or more long term, planning for what we are going to do when we graduate or where we are going to live when we retire. Nor is Baptism something we worry about like taking a test or interviewing for a job.

Baptism is not like any of these things.

Rather, baptism is kind of like getting a tetanus shot or a social security card or a license for your boat trailer or setting up an account with Amazon. You get those things or do those things because you need to, but then after that, you don't think about them again.

For most of us, baptism is like that, and to prove my point, let me ask, when was the last time you thought about your own baptism?

If you are like most people it's probably been a while, but you probably also have a good reason. It's not that we don't care about our baptism. Rather, it's just that most of us were infants when we were baptized, and so we have no memories of our baptism. All we have are pictures of the priest baptizing us while our godparents and parents looked on.

So, if we don't remember our baptism, and we hardly ever think about it, does that mean it's unimportant or that it's not significant?

No. Not at all.

Baptism is essential. In fact, Baptism is necessary for salvation. Jesus said, "**Amen, amen, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God (Jn 3:5).**" Here, we believe that Jesus was speaking about Baptism. It's also the case that Jesus directed the Apostles to go and baptize all the nations (Mt 28:19)."

Finally, I would point out that we are to imitate Jesus in all things. We are to do what He did, and the fact that our Lord Himself was baptized (even though He was in no need of it) serves as an example and a sign to us that we are in need of this spiritual washing.

Now some people don't think we need baptism. They say we are saved by faith. They quote Saint Paul who said, **"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved (Rm 10:9)."** Saint Paul also said, **"For by grace you have been saved through faith (Eph 2:8)."**

Because of these words, some folks say that we are justified, that is, we are made right with God simply by our belief in Jesus Christ and the fact that He suffered and died for us. So when talking about salvation, they never mention baptism at all. They only mention faith in Jesus Christ.

However, we are not saved by faith alone. It even says so in the Bible. In the Letter of Saint James it says, **"A man is justified by works and not by faith alone (Jm 2:24)."** The key point here is that faith is necessary for salvation but not sufficient; more is needed than just faith.

So why is baptism necessary for salvation? Why is it essential? The short answer is simple. It's how we are first forgiven of sin. Baptism heals the wounds of Original Sin and bestows upon us a share in God's life which we call sanctifying grace.

Through baptism, we are reconciled to God, and we are raised up to become His adopted sons and daughters. Baptism makes us part of God's family. As such, we have the right to inherit what God Himself possesses, namely, eternal life. It is through baptism that we first receive the gift of faith and that our souls are marked with an indelible mark for all eternity indicating that we are Christians. For all these reasons, baptism is essential for our salvation.

We can think about the link between faith and baptism in this way. Faith is like recognizing that something is true and baptism is like embracing that truth. It's putting your faith into action.

When you go shopping, you start by looking at things, but at some point you stop looking and make a purchase. When you become interested in some club or service organization or sports league, at some point, you may decide you want to join and become a member. Then, to actually join, you fill out the paperwork or make some pledge.

Baptism is like that. Baptism is the first step in putting your faith into action. You go from the outside looking in to becoming a member of the Church and an adopted son or daughter of God. As a member of the Church, you become part of God's family. God becomes your Father and Jesus your brother. Then you have the right to receive the other Sacraments and all of the graces and privileges of membership. At the same time, you also have the duty to live as a faithful member of Christ's Church, setting a good example for others by living in love.

Baptism is necessary and vital to our spiritual life. Even if we don't think about it every day, even if we have no actual memories of our own baptism, it is still something operating in the background of our spiritual lives every day and every hour and every minute.

Let me put this another way. Suppose that you weren't baptized. What then? Well, first of all, it would mean you are not a member of the Church. That would also mean you could not receive Holy Communion nor the Sacrament of Penance, nor Confirmation, nor Matrimony, nor Anointing of the Sick. None of these sources of God's grace would be available to you.

Also, you would not be part of God's adopted family. You would not be God's son or daughter. Instead, you would be like a neighbor or an acquaintance or some distant relative. You would not be family. God would not be your Father and Jesus would not be your brother except in a distant sense, and you yourself would probably not give much thought to this.

Just think about the people who aren't religious or who aren't baptized or who don't have their children baptized. How often do you suppose they think about God as a loving Father? How often do they give thanks to our Lord for the Sacrifice He made for us? How often do they take comfort in the fact that God has taken us in and made us part of His own divine family? Probably not very often.

So here's the thing, and this is important. We live in a world where most people, even those who may have come from Christian backgrounds, never think about baptism. In addition, they don't think about getting their children baptized either – unless grandma is pestering them.

So how does this concern us? Well it means we must recognize that we Catholics are very different from other people. That said, we should think about what it means to be baptized, and what it means is this: Through baptism, we have become part of God's family, and that in turn means we must live differently from those who don't belong to our family.

We must live as brothers and sisters in the Lord, caring for one another and helping one another and living in peace with one another and being forgiving and merciful to one another – as our Lord Jesus Christ has been to us. That's what loving our neighbor means.

We must also love our God and worship Him and express our gratitude and thanks for the great love He has shown us. We do that by going to Mass on Sundays. That's what loving God with our whole heart and mind and soul and strength means.

Another thing is this. We must tell others how important and necessary it is to be baptized. We must tell them about Jesus and then, once they believe, help them put their faith in action by getting baptized.

One last thing. A reminder to parents. The Church expects and requires that you have your children baptized in the first weeks after birth. Failure to do this is a serious sin. So do not delay in having them baptized.

From all of this, we can see that it's good for us to think about our own baptism from time to time, and to give thanks to God that He has given to us the gift of faith and the grace to act on it. He has not given these graces to everyone, and the fact that He has given them to us is a sign of His special favor for us, and that is also something for which to give thanks. Amen.