

Baptism of the Lord

READINGS: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11; Titus 2:11-14, 3: 4-7; Luke 3:15- 6, 21-22
Identified with Humanity

There is a story about George Washington, the first president of the United States of America. During The American Revolutionary War One day General Washington was travelling alone on horseback to a check post. He was in civil dress. For, he did not want anyone to recognize him as general. On the way he found some soldiers trying hard to pull out a horse cart with full of logs that had sunk deep into mud. A lieutenant was standing near the cart giving orders to the soldiers. He was full of rage and was angry that the soldiers could not move the cart even a little bit even half an hours after the cart had sunk into the mud. He was scolding them vigorously accusing of their laziness. General Washington watched all those things that were going on for a couple of minutes. He approached the lieutenant and said, "Sir, along with giving orders to the soldiers if you are also helping them a little bit you may be able to pull out the cart". The lieutenant did not like the comment of Washington and he retorted saying, "Sir, mind your own business. I know very well of what I have to do in this matter. I am a senior officer with a lieutenant's rank. I don't think it is the duty of a lieutenant to help the soldiers to pull out a cart". "Sorry sir, for offending you by my words". General Washington said, "If you don't mind I can help the soldiers to pull out the cart". Saying so, General Washington approached the horse cart and helped the soldiers to pull it out of the mud. Before mounting on his horse and leaving the place the General said to the lieutenant, "Sir, if you need any help like this I am always ready to help you. So in similar occasions if you need some ones help please send one of your men to army headquarters and say we need the help of General Washington". The lieutenant could not say anything in reply. For, only then he knew it was General Washington who helped the soldiers to pull out the cart.

Looking at the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan, we find that Jesus did not need a rebirth since he was from all eternity the only begotten child of God. He had no original sin to be cleansed from. Did Jesus need initiation? Yes. Being human, Jesus needed to associate and to identify with the community of men and women who were dedicated to promoting the cause of the kingdom of God. When it comes to serving God, no one is an island. We need to interact with other children of God. We need the community of faith just as Jesus did. We need the church. Empowerment: the Holy Spirit is the power of the Most High. The Spirit that descended on Jesus at his baptism strengthened and empowered him. It was at his baptism that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; [and] he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:37-38). Consecration: Baptism for Jesus was a moment of self-consecration, a moment of self-dedication. For him it was a commitment to do whatever was necessary to promote the cause of the kingdom of God on earth. We read that soon after Jesus' baptism, John was arrested and the Kingdom of God movement needed a new leadership. When Jesus heard it he went up and took on the task, in this way implementing the commitment he made at his baptism to promote the kingdom of God. Making a commitment is the most important part of any great task that we undertake. Commitment is the key element of all noble adventures, wonderful discoveries, and heroic human deeds. Commitment and faith go together - each builds up the other.

Years ago, there was a conference in England to discuss the question, "What makes Christianity different from all the other religions of the world?" At the conference, some suggested that

Christianity is unique in its teaching that God became a human being. It was pointed out that the Hindu religion has many instances of God coming to earth as human. Others suggested that it is the belief in the resurrection. Again it was pointed out that other faiths believe that the dead rise again. The debate grew loud and heated until C. S. Lewis, the great defender of Christianity, came in. "What's the rumpus about?" he asked. When he was told that it was a question of the uniqueness of Christianity, he said, "Oh, that's easy. It's grace." the second reading from the Letter to Titus focuses not on Jesus but on us as people who have been saved through the grace of baptism.

In today's Gospel we are told about the secret power of Jesus Christ. St. Luke tells us about this power. He says that it is the Holy Spirit who came and descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove when he was baptized. "Heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit came down upon him in bodily form like a dove". The Holy Spirit is the presence of God's power. It is about this power that the book of Genesis, Chapter 1:2 speaks when it says, "the Spirit of God hovered over the waters at the beginning of creation". It is this power of God that came down on Jesus at his Baptism. Holy Spirit is a power that transforms us interiorly, that stimulates man's thirst for spiritual truth. It is a power of conviction, of cleansing the heart and of strengthening the will. When this power enters into lethargic Christians, they become active and enthusiastic. When this power enters into those who are dead in sin, they become alive. When the Spirit came to Moses, the plagues came upon Egypt. When the Spirit came upon Elijah, fire came down from heaven. When the Spirit came upon Joshua, the whole city of Jerusalem fell into his hands. But when the Spirit came upon Jesus at his Baptism, the Spirit empowered him to heal and to teach, to give up his life on the cross for humanity and finally rise from the dead.

Ever since our Lord ascended into heaven, the same Holy Spirit has continued to descend upon his faithful followers. If martyrs suffered torture, missionaries worked in foreign lands, married couples persevered in fidelity and monks went into the desert, they were able to do all this in the power of the Spirit. This same Holy Spirit has been guiding the "Church in the way of truth and unity", constantly the Spirit renews the Church, to keep the freshness of her youth. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that soon the priest will change bread and wine into the sacred body and blood of Christ. By baptism we, too, have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. Whenever we are enabled to endure difficulties and disappointments, whenever we are strengthened to survive losses and disasters, let us remember that it is by the power of the Holy Spirit. Whenever the Spirit comes into any believer he makes Christ dearer, heaven nearer and the Word of God clearer.

Prayer: Almighty Father, through the baptism of Your Son Jesus Christ, You opened the heavens for us. May we always open our hearts to receive Your heavenly blessings; we ask this in Jesus' precious name....Amen