

The Baptism of the Lord (C)
(Isaiah 40:1-5. 9-11 / Luke 3:15-16. 21-22)
13.01.2019

Dear brothers and sisters,

Jesus, who is at the centre of our faith, was both God and man, fully God and fully man. Being truly man, Jesus became aware of his identity and his mission progressively as happens in the case of every human being. Little by little, Jesus was led to experience a special relationship with God in prayer, something akin to the relationship of a son with his father. Little by little, Jesus felt himself inhabited by a desire to make God known to his people. Obviously, there were days when Jesus' prayer and ministry ran smoothly; but there were probably days when prayer and ministry were more difficult, less spontaneous; and there were also days when Jesus was tempted, discouraged and even afraid.... This was the consequence of Jesus' being a man.

Came the day when Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist in the river Jordan. I quote from today's gospel passage: "While Jesus after his baptism was at prayer, Heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Him in a bodily shape, like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: **'You are my Son, the beloved; my favour rests on you'**."

There is no doubt that this event -the voice from Heaven and those words addressed personally to Jesus- constituted a key-moment in his life. On the day of his baptism, Jesus' identity and mission became clearer to him. Jesus was really and fully a man, the Son of Mary, but He was also the Son of God, the unique and beloved Son of his heavenly Father, God himself. On this day, Jesus became aware of his mission to reveal the Father's love to all men and women of good will, without exception.

On the day of his baptism, Jesus was confirmed in his identity and his mission. Afterwards, in his prayer, throughout the rest of his life, Jesus probably came back often to those words uttered by the heavenly voice: "**You are my Son, the beloved; my favour rests on you**". Jesus was confirmed by that voice from heaven in the same way as Mary was confirmed by the words of her cousin Elizabeth at her visitation: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb". We all need to be confirmed in our graced identity not only by God, but also by our brothers and sisters, during our earthly pilgrimage of faith. We might ask ourselves: Are we aware that it is our duty as Christians to confirm and comfort in their lives of faith those with whom we live? Are we doing that?

Jesus' baptism invites us to reflect upon our own baptism. On the day of our christening, we became adopted sons or daughters of God, and so brothers and sisters. We are children of God; each one of us is personally loved by God with a love stronger than death. We are invited to meditate upon these words day after day and to find in them confirmation of our Christian identity and our mission.

To be a beloved son or a beloved daughter of God is our real identity: one which we have to come back to over and over again in thought and prayer.

Some people think that they are what they do at work. The day they retire, they become depressed because, no longer working as they used to, suddenly they form the impression that they have become nothing! The truth is that we are not what we do. We are beloved sons or daughters of God! This is who we are. We used to work but now that we are retired we are called to live in a different way, while remaining what we have always been: a child of God. This is our identity.

Some people think that they are their sexual identity. They say: I am gay! I am lesbian! I am straight! No. We are not just any of these. We are beloved sons and daughters of God, with a personal history, with qualities, gifts, skills, with a job, with a lot personal relationships, and with a sexual identity. Our baptism forbids us to reduce ourselves to our sexual identity or to allow others to reduce us to our sexual identity. First and foremost, we are beloved sons and daughters of God.

Some people think that they are what they have: a diploma, a comfortable bank account, a title, a top position, or what they have not; they imagine: if only I won the lotto, if only I got some promotion... then everything would be fine! All that is an illusion! What is important is our identity as beloved children of God. Being rich or poor, of a lower or a higher rank, none of this is important; this is not the point. Our deep and true happiness depends on who we are and not on what we have.

Yes, on the day of our baptism, we became beloved sons and daughters of God. God does not cease to speak to us, as a father speaks to his child, through his word, the sacraments of the Church, the events and the persons we meet. God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – dwells within us. He is all around us. He does not cease to tell us that he loves us, that we are his or her beloved child. His love for us is eternal; it will last beyond death. Let us welcome the good news of our baptism. Let us meditate upon it day after day. We are not alone; we are loved.

Our mission is to help our brothers and sisters in humanity to discover their identity. It is to help each one recognize that they are loved by God, just as they are. We do that not so much with words but mainly by the example of our lives. If we are happy and people know this to be the case, seeing that our happiness derives from our relationship with the Lord, then we bear testimony to the Christian life and fulfil our mission; we also encourage others to find their happiness.

The happiness of all is to be beloved children of God.

Amen!