

Sunday, January 13, 2019

The Baptism of the Lord

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Responsorial: Psalm 29:1-4, 9-10

2nd Reading: Acts 10:34-38

Gospel: Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

The Baptism of the Lord, *The Beginning of Our Salvation, Healing, and Deliverance*

All were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. (Luke 3:15)

The people who had come to hear John the Baptist were expecting something explosive. A prophet had arisen who would denounce all the enemies, all the “bad guys” who made life hard for everyone else. Maybe he was the Christ, the Messiah, come to cast out the Romans and their henchmen and restore Israel to its former glory.

But then came Jesus. A small-town carpenter who spent his time with the powerless and the sinful. The Spirit came upon him instead—not a fiery preacher calling out people’s sins, but a humble man preaching love of enemies. Surely people were caught off guard.

Jesus came “to open the eyes of the blind,” not to cast the bad guys into hell (Isaiah 42:7). He came “to bring out prisoners from confinement,” not to punish people for their sins (42:7). He came to take away our sins so that we could learn to love one another—good guy and bad guy alike.

When you hear this reading today, close your eyes and picture the scene. Picture John immersing Jesus into the Jordan River—a river that had received the sins of all who had come for baptism. Imagine Jesus accepting all of those sins and every sin that they represent.

For the next three years, Jesus will bear these sins, along with the sins of everyone else he comes into contact with. And still bearing those sins, he will teach us about his Father’s mercy, heal us from the wounds of sin, and deliver us from whatever hatred and bitterness is stored up in our hearts. Then he will take all that sin, hatred, and bitterness to the cross, where he will put it to death forever.

Today is the beginning of salvation for you and for everyone else, good guy and bad guy alike. So rejoice in this salvation and ask Jesus to help you love as he loves. Ask him to help you love everyone.

“Praise to you, Jesus, for taking all my sins!”

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion:

1. The first reading from the book of Isaiah is a prophecy that describes in vivid detail the many aspects of Jesus' mission: *Thus says the LORD: Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations, not crying out, not shouting, not making his voice heard in the street. a bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench, until he establishes justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait for his teaching.*
 - In what ways has Jesus fulfilled the mission described above?
 - How would you describe Jesus' mission? In what ways has he fulfilled your understanding of his mission?
 - In what ways has he called you to continue this mission?
2. The Responsorial Psalm opens with these words: *Give to the LORD, you sons of God, give to the LORD glory and praise, Give to the LORD the glory due his name; adore the LORD in holy attire.*
 - How would you describe the ways you give the Lord glory and praise - and adore him?
 - What are the challenges in your life that can prevent you from doing this?
3. In the second reading, these opening words of Peter at Cornelius' home describe God's great desire to reach all people: *In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him. You know the word that he sent to the Israelites as he proclaimed peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.*
 - Why are Peter's words just as important today as they were when he first spoke them?
 - What steps you can take to promote "peace through Jesus Christ," promote greater unity among Catholics and non-Catholics, and promote greater mutual understanding between Christians and non-Christians?
4. In the Gospel reading, John the Baptist speaks these words when asked if he was the Christ: *I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.* The reading ends with these words: *After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."*
 - What do you think John meant when he said that Jesus will "baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire"?
 - When you were baptized, you also received the Holy Spirit and were united to Jesus and drawn into his relationship with the Father. What are some specific examples of how have you experienced this?
 - How can you open yourself even more to allowing the Holy Spirit to come into your life in a deeper way?
 - In what ways do these closing words of the reading also apply to you: *And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased"?*
5. The meditation is a reflection on the first reading and the Gospel reading. It includes these words: *Jesus came "to open the eyes of the blind," not to cast the bad guys into hell (Isaiah 42:7). He came "to bring out prisoners from confinement," not to punish people for their sins (42:7). He came to take away our sins so that we could learn to love one another—good guy and bad guy alike. It also describes Jesus' ministry after his baptism: For the next three years, Jesus will bear these sins, along with the sins of everyone else he comes into contact with. And still bearing those sins, he will teach us about his Father's mercy, heal us from the wounds of sin, and deliver us from whatever hatred and bitterness is stored up in our hearts. Then he will take all that sin, hatred, and bitterness to the cross, where he will put it to death forever. The meditation ends with these words: Today is the beginning of salvation for you and for everyone else, good guy and bad guy alike. So rejoice in this salvation and ask Jesus to help you love as he loves. Ask him to help you love everyone.*
 - How would you describe the meaning of these words from the meditation? *He (Jesus) came to take away our sins so that we could learn to love one another—good guy and bad guy alike ... Then he will take all that sin, hatred, and bitterness to the cross, where he will put it to death forever.*
 - How have you experienced the freedom from sin that Jesus' baptism has won for you?
 - What do the ending words of the meditation mean to you?

Take some time now to pray and thank the Lord for being baptized for you and coming to take away your sins. Use the prayer below from the end of the meditation as the starting point.

"Praise to you, Jesus, for taking all my sins!"

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization (www.christlife.org), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National Fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for The Word Among Us Partners ministry. He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]