



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION ON THE FEAST OF BAPTISM OF LORD

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 12 January 1997

1. *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19).*

Today the Church is celebrating the feast of the Baptism of Christ, and this year too I have the joy of administering the sacrament of Baptism to several newborn babies: 10 girls and nine boys, 14 of whom are Italian, two Polish, one Spanish, one Mexican and one Indian. Welcome, dear parents, who have come here with your little ones. I also greet the godparents, as well as all of you who are present.

2. Dear brothers and sisters, before administering this sacrament to these newborn children, I would like to reflect with you on the word of God we have just heard. The Gospel according to Mark, like the other synoptics, recounts Jesus' Baptism in the River Jordan. The liturgy of Epiphany recalls this event in a triptych that includes the adoration of the Magi from the East and the wedding at Cana. Each of these three moments in the life of Jesus of Nazareth is *a particular revelation of his divine sonship*. The Eastern Churches give particular emphasis to today's feast, calling it in short, “Jordan”. They consider it a moment in the manifestation of Christ closely connected with Christmas. Indeed, more than his birth in Bethlehem, the Eastern liturgy highlights the revelation of Jesus as Son of God, which took place with extraordinary intensity precisely during his Baptism in the Jordan.

What John the Baptist was conferring on the banks of the Jordan was a baptism of repentance for conversion and the forgiveness of sins. But he announced: “After me comes one who is mightier than I.... I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit (Mk 1:7-8). He proclaimed this to a multitude of penitents who flocked to him confessing their sins, repenting and

preparing to correct their lives.

The Baptism given by Jesus, which the Church, faithful to his command, does not cease to administer, is quite different. *This Baptism frees man from original sin and forgives his sins*, saves him from slavery to evil and is a sign of his rebirth in the Holy Spirit; it imparts to him a new life, which is participation in the life of God the Father, given to us by his Only-Begotten Son who became man, died and rose again.

3. As Jesus comes out of the water, the Holy Spirit descends upon him like a dove, the heavens open and the Father's voice is heard from on high: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Mk 1:11). Thus the event of Christ's Baptism is not only a revelation of his divine sonship, but at the same time *a revelation of the whole Blessed Trinity*. The Father — the voice from on high — reveals in Jesus the Only-Begotten Son consubstantial with him, and all this comes about by virtue of the Holy Spirit who, in the form of a dove, descends on Christ, the Lord's Anointed.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we read of the Baptism administered by the Apostle Peter to the centurion Cornelius and his family. Thus Peter carries out the risen Christ's command to his disciples: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). Baptism by water and the Holy Spirit is *the first and basic sacrament of the Church*, the sacrament of new life in Christ.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, in a few moments these children will also receive Baptism and become living members of the Church. They will first be anointed with the *oil of catechumens*, a sign of Christ's gentle strength given to them to fight against evil. Then *blessed water* will be poured on them, a sign of their interior purification through the gift of the Holy Spirit, poured out by Jesus as he was dying on the Cross. They are then immediately given a second and more important anointing with "*chrism*", to show that they are consecrated in the image of Jesus, the Father's Anointed. Then each child's father receives a candle to be lit from the paschal candle, a symbol of the light of faith which the parents and godparents must continue to safeguard and nourish with the life-giving grace of the Spirit.

Dear parents and godparents, let us entrust these little ones to the Virgin Mary's motherly intercession. Let us ask her to make them, dressed in their white garments, a sign of their new dignity as children of God, true Christians and courageous witnesses to the Gospel throughout their lives.

Amen!

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