

BAPTISM OF THE LORD YEAR – Year C
(Is 40:1-5, 9-11; Ps 104; Lk 3:15-16, 21-22)

A man and his wife were having an argument about who should brew the coffee each morning. The wife said, "You should do it, because you get up first, and then we won't have to wait as long to get our coffee." The husband said, "You are in charge of cooking around here and you should do it, because that is your job, and I can just wait for my coffee." The wife replies, "No, you should do it, and besides, it is in the Bible that the man should do the coffee." The husband replies, "I can't believe that, show me." So she fetched the Bible, opened the New Testament and showed him at the top of several pages, that it indeed says....."HE-BREWS"

Have you ever wondered why Jesus needed to be baptized?

Live your baptism and follow Jesus into a new creation.

One of the reasons that Jesus was baptized is to dramatize that faith is all about a personal, intimate relationship with God. Jesus is the unique, only Son of God. At his baptism he was blessed by the Father's voice and anointed by the Spirit to deliver God's people, out of sheer love. This love relationship of Jesus with the Father and the Spirit is so powerful it brings about a new creation, a second reason for his baptism.

The dove-Spirit that hovered over the water and over Jesus, who is the Word of God, symbolizes a new Exodus, and a new passage into the Promised Land. Through his baptism, Jesus re-unites heaven and earth, not as it was before the sin of humanity or the disappearance of the last prophet (in Jewish tradition) but rather this event begins a new era of eschatology. Heaven has come down and the kingdom of Jesus is now begun, which will eventually be transformed at the Parousia into the fullness of the kingdom of the Father.

The baptism of Jesus also proclaims the Freedom of the children of God. Jesus is the Davidic Messiah-King, the Son of God, who begins an era of eschatological hope that sees the overthrow of Satan, foreshadowed in the temptation narrative that immediately follows the baptism of Jesus. John is simply a Forerunner; with Jesus we enter another world: The heavens open, the Spirit descends, a divine Voice speaks, the Son of God appears; the Spirit shows power, Satan tempts Jesus among angels who minister to him.

The outcome of this desert encounter is that Jesus, and he alone, is completely victorious against all the powers of the evil one.

The baptism of Jesus is the initial encounter between the Spirit-filled Son of God and the ruler of this present age. The temptation is a trial, a test, a tribulation and it does not end there - it will happen again on the cross where Jesus will feel God-forsaken, unlike here where there are ministering angels. However, the final event of the cross will be total victory - resurrection and renewal in the Spirit.

The baptism of Jesus also highlights the Mission of Jesus. Jesus has a mission to lead us, like Joshua, through the waters of baptism to new life. Jesus had a two-fold mission: He came to redeem and to sanctify; to save us from sin and to make us holy. All we have to do is believe, and follow Him through our own baptism to the Cross.

Jesus Redeems us through forgiveness. As we go into the desert of self-awareness; as we repent, as we confess our sins, as we genuinely desire to change our ways, and as we stop any addictive behaviour, we are redeemed.

Jesus then Sanctifies us through healing. In the words of the readings for today, as we renounce impiety and worldly passions, we are renewed by the Spirit who takes away our mountains of pride; who fills in our valleys of selfishness, who straightens out our crooked ways of addiction and smoothens our rough ways of anger.

This mission of Jesus can be seen as an invitation to his disciples to be pilgrims on a healing journey. Unlike the baptism of John, the baptism of Jesus is new, not just prayer for baptism of repentance, but re-creation through forgiveness and love. A sign of that is Jesus with the wild beasts, which evokes Isaiah's mention of the return of heavenly peace: we are empowered to deal with our own demons and wild beasts. We experience healing through a journey of self-awareness, faith and fellowship.

Don is a recovering alcoholic. He finally ended up at a rehabilitation centre for treatment. During his stay there he participated in presentations on the Twelve Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous. He took to the Steps like a duck to water, and really started to work the program. He admitted that he was powerless over alcohol; came to believe that God could restore him to

sanity, and made a decision to finally surrender his life and stubborn self-will to God as he understood God.

Next he did a searching and fearless moral inventory of his whole life, remembering reliving, feeling the pain and the shame, something that took raw courage.

He then shared his story with God, himself and another human being (in this case, me) in Step 5, and experienced the powerful release of forgiveness and freedom from guilt, fear and shame.

Determined to work the Steps thoroughly, he continued with Steps 6 & 7 where he learned to express with love his feelings of anger and resentment towards all those people who had hurt him throughout his life. Doing this, he was able to forgive them and experience healing from these demons he had carried for over thirty years.

Finally, he wrote many letters to those whom he had hurt, asking for forgiveness from them and seeking to make amends. What a healing journey he experienced! And what an inspiration he was to others, and to me – he wanted me to read all his letters! I managed to read only one, the one to his mother, and I use that letter to this day, with his permission, as a model of forgiveness and healing.

The Eucharist we celebrate today on this feast of the Baptism of Jesus is an intimate encounter with the love of the Father for Jesus and us in the Spirit. We are nourished for our healing journey through the Word, and the new Wine and the Bread of the Kingdom.

So, let us live our baptism and follow Jesus into a new creation.