

Homily for the Baptism of the Lord
January 12, 2020
By Nick Thompson

Hear and ponder the words John the Baptist spoke to Jesus: I need to be baptized by you and yet you are coming to me? Jesus is about to institute the Sacrament of Baptism, for the salvation of all mankind, for the salvation of each and every one of us, a pathway for adoption of humanity into his own heavenly family. Adam and Eve broke the relationship between God and humanity with original sin, Jesus now allows John to fulfill all righteousness, to represent all of humanity, through this Baptism on the Jordan's bank. In the same place that Joshua and the chosen people passed through these waters into the promised land after forty years of wandering in the desert of sin, Jesus allows humanity to fully participate in making the relationship between itself and God right. Through the Baptizing action of John and the divine providence of Jesus, we once again are given the means to become sons and daughters of God able to pass through Baptism water, through the womb of the church into the Kingdom of Heaven.

How often in our lives we hope that God Himself will come and save us—only to find that He does save us just seemingly, not directly, as we would prefer, but rather through the action of another human being. Jesus sprinkles us, splashes us with grace through the loving

action of our neighbor, through the reconciling words of a priest in the dark corners of the church, through immersion in the Holy Spirit and nurturing with everlasting food. Answering prayers through the good works of others, through the good works of neighbors is simply part of Jesus taking on our humanity for all time. How often does He ask us to help others in His name and to do good to others in His name—and yet, we forget that our participation in His mission, in His name, is part and parcel of our salvation. The mystery of the Baptism of the Lord is about Jesus becoming totally immersed in our humanity and thereby our humanity becoming immersed in the ongoing actions of the body of Christ Himself. Synonyms for immersion are plunging, dunking, dousing, soaking, drenching, steeping, saturating, bathing, rinsing and splashing. In Baptism then we are plunging into, bathing in, soaking in the body of Jesus Christ. Baptism is the sound a soul makes when it splashes in an ocean of grace.

This imagery of immersion fits perfectly with the image of baptism. We heard in Psalm 29, “The voice of the Lord is over the waters, the Lord over vast waters” and “The Lord is enthroned above the flood.” Just as the early imagery of the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord speaks about all of the water of the earth becoming holy because Jesus is baptized in the water, so we can understand that all of creation becomes holy because Jesus our savior and redeemer takes on our

humanity in order to defeat mortality, to defeat sin. This same imagery occurs at the cross when Jesus is pierced by the lance and blood and water pour forth from his lungs over the earth, from the source of His breath the Holy Spirit pours over the earth. The same imagery exists at each of the processions that occur during this and every Sunday liturgy. The priest leaves the Baptismal font, the womb of the church, into which each of us was immersed, bathing and splashing to become children of God, and proceeds up the aisle with a wall of Baptized to the right and a wall of baptized to the left like Moses and the chosen people passing from slavery to freedom through the waters of the Red Sea we pass from slavery to sin into the freedom of sainthood, into holiness through the waters of our' Baptism.

You and I are that holiness of the Lord Jesus, given flesh so that we can radiate that holiness to one another and to all whom we meet drenching them, dousing them in the Holy Spirit through our works of mercy. This helps us understand the first reading, from the Prophet Isaiah, who tells us that the Lord formed us, and set us as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness. Through our Baptism we have become Paschal candles, lights of Christ. Through divine action we have been called by name, grasped by the hand and formed as servant, anointed by the

Holy Spirit to participate in Jesus' fulfillment of all righteousness to restore the relationship between God and humanity once darkened by sin but now washed white as snow in the blood of the lamb. We are the people of God!

This Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is not about standing on one side and watching the Lord do great things as if we were watching waves break on the beach. No, it is about us becoming the wave, becoming that which alters the face of the sand each and every time it passes by. It is about us living fully and allowing the Lord to do great things in and through us. The Lord will and does bless his people with peace through our actions in his name. Holy is His name. It is true that the Lord works marvels in us. It is true that you and I are called to be saints, even when we feel the least saintly. The only goal for each of us, for all of us is to do the Will of the Father. That is what Jesus set out to do and it is what He invites us to do in his name. Baptism is the sound our soul makes when it splashes in an ocean of grace. We need not worry how well we do it, how much noise we make, we need only keep trying to splash in that ocean. Our reading from Acts of the Apostles reminds us, "whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him." In seeking to do His will is our peace. In seeking to do His will is all of our fulfillment. Simply seeking to do his will is ensuring our place in his kingdom. May the Lord Jesus immerse us, plunge us, drench us,

draw us deep into His baptism today as we fully embrace all the suffering, the joy and delight that comes with embracing His Father's Will.