

Homily. Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Year.C. 12/13 January 2019.

The weeks of Ordinary Time start as they should, and as our own lives of faith do, with the Baptism of the Lord. Jesus didn't need to be Baptised because of sin as we do. He went to John for His Baptism as a way of marking a change of direction in His life. No longer was He to be simply son of Mary, most probably a widow at this stage, in far away Galilee. Nor was He to continue working in the building industry following in Joseph's footsteps, as we think was the case. At the River Jordan and through His Baptism by John, Jesus moved on from this private, quiet way of living.

Luke says that after His Baptism, and while He was in prayer, the Holy Spirit descended on Him in bodily form like a dove. This tells us of the powerful reality and meaning captured by this event. Onwards from this point, Jesus dedicated all of His time and energy to the mission of spreading God's Good-News. In the end it would cost Him not less than everything, sacrificing Himself for us and for the salvation of the world.

It is into the baptism of Jesus Christ that we've have been baptised. St. Paul says that this means we've embarked on the journey of giving up everything that does not lead to God, letting go of all that isn't in accord with God's mind and will. This sounds like hard work, and at times it is. What we must remember is that Baptism is a gift, a free grace, given to us by God. It's an act of God's kindness and love, initiating our life-long process that seeks to end selfishness so that we can be renewed in God's love until we become like God, become Love itself.

At some point in time our Baptism was re-affirmed and renewed in Confirmation, which means exactly what the word says; the confirming of our Baptism so that we can then move on to the Lord's table of the Eucharist. Day after day and week by week we gather, as we are here, at the table of the feast of life. We do this in order to receive our Lord, be fed, strengthened and nourished by Him and on Him, so that we can become ever more like Him, the very meaning of our Baptism into Christ.

It's well known that some use Baptism for other purposes. This is a sad truth, but one that's far from new. It's a fact that from earliest times some have used the Sacrament of Baptism for aims other than those it means and expresses. Our goal here and now is to make people understand the right meaning and importance of the promises and commitments that they're making in seeking Baptism. Having done our best at this it remains for us to make the celebration of Baptism, and indeed all of the Sacraments, as warm, welcoming and as gracious as is the grace of God they seek to impart. Lastly, we have to continue the work of evangelising the newly Baptised and their families, most often effective with deeds, kind gestures and prayers than with more words or over inflated rituals.

In the last analysis, people are responsible to God and to their own consciences for what they have said and done, as are you and I, too, for what we do and say to help and guide them. This is our mission in our modern society; to wrap the flesh of doing around the bones of Sacramental words and promises. Doing this is truly living our Baptism into Christ. The rest we must confidently leave in God's merciful hands.