

## Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Jan 19th 2020

The depictions of Christ's baptism in the River Jordan are many. From paintings by Leonardo Da Vinci to stained glass windows by Tiffany, the central elements are the same: Jesus and his cousin, John the Baptist, in the Jordan River with the Holy Spirit overhead as a dove. As Catholics, we enjoy the fine work of the talented artists, but it does not begin to fully convey the depth and significance of Christ's baptism and what it truly means for us.

The word "baptize" is Greek in origin (baptizein), which means to plunge or immerse, and baptism is the first and probably the most important sacrament of the Church. It is through baptism that we are brought into the Church. It is God's most precious gift to us, and it signifies our liberation from sin and that the Holy Spirit dwells within us.

It has been said that by our own baptism we became missionary disciples of Christ and as such we need to be personally involved and actively engaged in living a faith-filled life, participating in a Christian community of faith and love. For is this not the very reason we belong to the Church, to be engaged in a community of faith and love?

I could expound upon the many benefits of baptism, but the more challenging question, one worthy of our reflection, is how are we using this precious gift? Maybe a good place for us to start is to reflect back when many of us, as parents presenting our children for baptism or as godparents, renewed our baptismal promises. These promises are as good a guidepost as any for us to continue to follow.

We might ask ourselves if, as engaged Christians, we are role models for our children. Do we worship together as a family and nurture our children to develop a strong faith? The same questions can be extended beyond our homes and families, to those with whom we interact in our workplaces and communities; do we present ourselves as engaged Christians and serve as role models?

I dare say all of us have come up short in answer to these questions, but do not despair, for our God is a loving and forgiving God. Equally as important, through our baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit dwells within us. Through the Holy Spirit, God is personal to each of us and has the power to transform us into the people we want to be.

The gift of the Holy Spirit that God gave us at our baptism is ours to call upon when we need guidance. The Holy Spirit can help us to live the lives we are capable of – lives as engaged Christians--lives of compassion and love for members of our families as well as strangers on the street. Maybe it is time for us to "plunge" ourselves back into our faith.

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