



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Baptism of the Lord, Year A

The gateway to life

Readings: Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7, Ps 28, Acts 10: 34-38, Matthew 3: 13-17

The church fills. Anxious mothers try to suppress over excited children who are looking forward to a party. The parents of the baby come in looking harassed. Have they remembered the white robe? Was the child fed recently enough to prevent a gastronomic incident at the font?

Granny is trying to look modest, proud and regal all at the same time but also wondering why the younger godmother has come wearing a little something less suited to the liturgy and more at home on a pole dancer.

Great Uncle Jack, whose last visit to church was recorded on his wedding lines, is skulking in the porch rehearsing his agnosticism against his dear wife's threat that, if he doesn't show up and behave, he will be cooking for himself next week. Rafts of young men, who have never heard a Paternoster vie for the back pew. Waves of maternal hormones engulf the candidate as women of all ages scrum for a brief cuddle.

The priest is effecting not to notice these little excitements and tensions and just get on with the job in hand.

It is, of course, the great family baptism day.

At the centre of it all is a little scrap of humanity that arrived looking like it had done ten rounds with Mike Tyson and yet was still the most beautiful thing its mum and dad had ever seen and whose lives it had changed forever.

In the midst of all this human and temporal excitement it is sometimes easy to forget what is being embarked on here.

Today we celebrate the Baptism of Christ, that feast when the Trinitarian nature of God is revealed on the banks of the Jordan River. The Father commends the Son to the world and the Holy Spirit descends upon Christ as He emerges from the water.

It is one of the great Theophanies in Holy Scripture, the place where God reveals Himself to Man.

Though you might not be aware of it the same remarkable revelation is present at the baptism of this little scrap and his motley supporters that I began with and was present when you too were held over the font or plunged into the Jordan. Plunged into the life, death and resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ, washed of our Original Sin and reconciled to our loving Father and anointed by the Holy Spirit to be the Church on earth and bring the Gospel to the world – that is what Mother Church reminds you of as your vocation when the priest asperges/blesses you with water at the outset of the Mass.

Those who have been baptised have been incorporated into the life of Christ, that is to say the life of God Himself. There is no more precious gift the Church has to offer. Listen to the Catechism's description....

'Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (vitae spiritualis ianua), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word'

In Baptism we ride high in the Ark of Salvation above the flood waters that sweep away the sins of the world. In Baptism, we walk, with the fleeing Hebrew, through the Red Sea which will close on our enemies and lead us on the long journey to the Promised Land. In Baptism we will stand at the Wedding of Cana and see the waters of purification, transformed by Jesus, into the Wine of the Heavenly Banquet, the Mass of Heaven and Earth, wedded in the Incarnate Christ.

In Baptism we will stand at the foot of the Cross with Our Lady and the Beloved Disciple as Jesus gives us to one another and the water flows from the wounded side of the sacrifice in whose death is our everlasting life. St Gregory of Nazianzus writes this, *'Baptism is God's most beautiful and magnificent gift.... We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal, and most precious gift. It is called gift because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own; grace since it is given even to the guilty; Baptism because sin is buried in the water; anointing for it is priestly and royal as are those who are anointed;*

enlightenment because it radiates light; clothing since it veils our shame; bath because it washes; and seal as it is our guard and the sign of God's Lordship.'

Let us all today give thanks to God for our own baptism and make the only New Year resolution that really matters - that we will, as the Body of Christ, the Church on earth, continue that mission that will bring to lost and the perishing humanity, the joy of the Gospel and the promise of eternal life.

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