

Last Sunday was the last day of the Christmas Season and so Monday was the first day of Ordinary Time. As mentioned before, the Church always concludes the Christmas Season with the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord. Transitioning from the Christmas season to Ordinary Time using the Baptism of our Lord reflects Sacred Scripture. The Gospels tell about the birth of our Lord and then remain almost entirely silent on His years growing up, the only exception being a brief account of the Finding in the Temple when Jesus was 12. The Gospels, then, basically move from the birth of our Lord to the beginning of His public work, which began with Jesus going to the Baptism of John. The Church, then, is simply following Scripture with the placement of the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord at the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of Ordinary Time.

Recall that during special seasons the Church contemplates a particular mystery of the faith (or of Christ), whereas in Ordinary Time the Church contemplates the entirety of the mystery of Christ. For this past Christmas season, I suggested contemplating the question of: why did Jesus come? There was/is no point in His coming unless the human soul is immortal. This led to a more specific suggestion for contemplation: the immortality of the human soul. This needs to be combined with contemplation of physical death – i.e., that the time for care of the human soul, the time for building it up, the time for becoming what we are meant to be – is limited. This, in turn, should bring about in me a sense of urgency in becoming what I am meant to be, an urgency that our Lord Himself expresses numerous times in the Gospels. Let us continue one more time with this meditation – our physical death and the immortality of our soul – bringing into it the Baptism of our Lord.

Each one of us *will* live in two different worlds. There is no getting around this. It is a fact. Now “facts” about anything can be in us in two different ways. They can just a piece of information we have in our mind. This is true of anything. Take math or history (or anything) for example. We can all know basic math or algebra or even some calculus. But for the mathematician who has made a lifetime of studying and thinking about such things, they are not just pieces of information but have actually become a part of him. As another example, we might have many historical facts in mind – say, for instance, Columbus set sail in 1492. For most, that is just a piece of information, like knowing someone’s phone number. For the historian, however, who has spent a lifetime thinking about such things, this knowledge has become part of him, so much so that he could easily spend hours talking about it, bringing out many ramifications of it and its connections to many other things.

The same is true for the faith, for relation with the Lord, for what He has revealed to us for the purpose of becoming part of His Kingdom, sons and daughters in our Father’s never-ending Kingdom. *But*, if we don’t spend time thinking about what He has told us, then it remains just a piece of information in our minds without any real impact. This renders what the good God has revealed to us pretty much useless. Our Lord Himself warns about this repeatedly, for example: “he who has ears ought to hear;” the parable of the seed and the sower is another example. With this in mind, with the *necessity* of thinking about the truths/realities that God has revealed, we return now to thinking about the combination of physical death, judgement, and the immortality of our soul, tying in the Baptism of our Lord; i.e., this is necessary, not optional, to fulfill the purpose of this life and to live in perfect happiness in the next world.

Recall to mind that our existence in this life and this world is just a short, brief part of our total existence. At the moment of physical death, everyone leaves this world (forever) and enters into another world, one that will last forever (perhaps first after passing through a final purification called Purgatory). **We will all live in two worlds**. This world is just a brief part of our existence. Nonetheless, it is also a critical part of our existence because it determines what it will be like for us in the next world. At the moment of death our never-ending fate is sealed. There are only 2 final outcomes, 2 and only 2 final possibilities after death – our Father’s Kingdom (probably after passing through a painful final purification) or the kingdom of hell, one of never-ending misery. Both are real possibilities for every single person. This world, this stage of our existence, is for choosing between those 2 outcomes, it is for choosing what the never-ending stage of our existence, in the next world, will be like. If a person chooses to treat that as irrelevant, thus treating this stage of our existence as if that’s all there is, they have chosen against becoming a son or daughter in their Father’s Kingdom. This is reality, it cannot be escaped, it cannot be otherwise, it does not depend on my opinion of it.

Everything that our Lord did and said is aimed at this reality – this world determining what the next world will be like for me. It includes, then, Jesus going to the baptism of John. As mentioned last Sunday, there is a lot of symbolism at the baptism of our Lord, all of which is irrelevant unless we have our own physical death, judgement, and immortality of the human soul in mind. In other words, we won't benefit from what our Lord is trying to teach us unless we have these realities firmly in mind.

One thing we might notice is that John's baptism is at the Jordan river. The Jordan river? Does this have significance? Recall that the Israelites, after being delivered from the cruel enslavement of the Egyptians, spent 40 years in the desert. Then finally they entered the "Promised Land" by crossing the Jordan river. The Promised Land is symbolic of the true or ultimate Promised Land, namely Heaven. So whatever is happening at the Jordan river, it has something to do with entering the true Promised Land. A dove also appears at our Lord's baptism. Where is the first place in Scripture that a dove is explicitly mentioned, or where a dove is carrying a message? It was at the flood, Noah and the Ark. The flood came to wash away sin. While in the Ark, Noah wanted to know if dry land had returned yet so he released a dove to see what would happen. The dove came back with an olive branch in its mouth, indicating that there is now new life. Whatever is happening at the Jordan, it entails new life. Finally, a person might also notice the words that came from Heaven: this is my beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased. Where else do you hear about a beloved son? Abraham and Isaac. Abraham, the father, was told by God to sacrifice his son. Abraham obeyed and we see Isaac going up a hill carrying wood on his back for the sacrifice. Of course this is a prefigurement of our Lord's sacrifice. Whatever is happening at the Jordan, it involved the sacrifice of Christ. So "swirling around" in the background of our Lord's participation in the baptism of John are: Heaven, Jesus' sacrifice, and some form of new life.

With that in mind – what is happening at the Jordan, at our Lord's baptism? Why does Jesus go to the baptism of John? We have to first say that John's baptism was not the sacrament of baptism; Scripture itself (John himself) alludes to this – I baptize with water but there is one coming after me who will baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit. Our Lord created the sacrament of Baptism and its effects flow from the merits of His Passion, neither of which had occurred yet. So John's baptism was not the sacrament of Baptism – it did not remit sin or reestablish interior relation with God. So what was John's baptism? Scripture itself says that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. In other words, it was a tangible way for people to acknowledge their sins and express their sorrow for them. Symbolically, then, the sins of all the people were in the Jordan River. Our Lord, who was without sin, then steps into the river filled with the filth of all human sin.

Why? What is happening? Our Lord's response to John answers the question. John knows who Jesus is. He knows Jesus is God, the one is not just a supreme being but Being itself from which all other existence comes. Jesus is the infinite God, He is: I Am Who Am. John then rightly protests, saying: it is You who should baptize me and yet you come to me? Our Lord does not rebuke him. Instead He says: let it be so for now *so as...* to fulfill all righteousness. Righteousness of man before God means freedom from the debt of sin. Our Lord enters the waters of the Jordan, containing all human sin, so as to indicate that He will pay the debt of sin, the barrier between God and man. Our Lord looks upon all mankind with great sympathy and says: you cannot pay the debt of worship, the debt of love, that you have incurred towards God. I will pay (with My sacrifice) and in doing so, I will purchase for you a way to salvation, to Heaven – to new life, a new (far superior) way of being human. However, while Jesus' sacrifice *was* an act of atonement, it was *not* an act of substitution, it was not: here take Him and not me. Our Lord did not go to the Cross so we wouldn't have to but rather to show us the way. We have to respond to His sacrifice, His love, with our own response of love (sacrifice of self) for Him.

Our Lord then begins His public work – teaching what that response, *mutual* love, entails. And what is the very first thing He says: Repent and believe in the Gospel. If you want to be part of your Father's Kingdom, if you want to access the infinite treasury of merit that our Lord won for us, there is no shortcut. The first thing that has to be sacrificed is our sins. Repentance is the first real step towards our Lord. *God bless you. Fr Kuhn*