

## Commentary to the Baptism of the Lord



The Baptism of the Lord: A Call to Change the World

This is the last Sunday of the Christmas Season and the First Sunday of Ordinary time. The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord concludes Christmas and begins the meditation on the ministry of Jesus. There are four aspects of this feast: 1) the Lord humbles himself before John the Baptist, 2) the Lord is empowered by the Spirit to begin the mission of the Father, 3) the Lord accepts the mission to suffer and die for us and 4) the Lord expresses his solidarity with those looking to change the world. The first aspect, the Lord humbling himself before John the Baptist is the traditional emphasis of the feast uniting the feast to Christmas. The Son of God humbles himself to such a degree that he is born in a manger. He humbles himself accepting the baptism of John even though he was sinless. Christ refuses to consider himself better than anyone.

The second aspect, the Lord is empowered by the Spirit to begin the mission of the Father is the aspect of the baptism that is emphasized by the Eastern Church, Catholic and Orthodox. At his baptism, the Spirit comes upon the Lord to such an extent that he is able to begin the mission of the Father. The third aspect, the Lord accepts the mission to suffer and die for us, flows from the first reading which is one of the Songs of the Suffering Servant in the book of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied about a Messiah who would not be a military commander but one who would suffer and die for the people. Today, though, I want to focus on the fourth aspect of the feast, the Lord expresses his solidarity with those looking to change the world. I want the world to be changed. You want this to be changed. This is not new. We are no different than the people of Jesus' time. Those who stood before John the Baptist were sick of a world full of cruelty, persecution, and war.

They wanted a change and they wanted to do something about this immediately. And do you know what they did? They repented their own sins. They recognized that the world is not going to change unless they change. Jesus saw this and joined them. The Man of Peace accepted the baptism of John because he also wanted the world changed. Then Jesus began his public life saying the Kingdom of God, the New Order is upon us. For the New Order to take place we had to conquer our enemies with

love. We had to stop striking back. The law of talons, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" cannot exist in the New Order. "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." "If someone wants to take your cloak, let him have it." The point is it takes two for hatred to grow. How can we be shocked at the presence of war when we all have refused to accept the dictates of the Sermon on the Mount. There are people who continually attack me and who continually attack you.

How do I respond? How do you respond? My inclination is to strike back. That is the way of hatred, not love. If that's the way I deal with problems, then what right do I have to be shocked that nations are always ready for war. How do you respond when you are attacked? Say a few choice words back, tell someone else what a terrible person your attacker is, do something to hurt the other person. That is our normal mode of operation. That is the reason why the world is always ready for war. Jesus stood before John the Baptist seeking a change in the world. He saw those who had been baptized before him as people realizing that the change had to begin with themselves. He joined them. He was baptized.

We can all be outraged by wars or other moral evils. But we must also recognize with an intense guilt that we participate evil every time we answer hatred with hatred instead of love. We who call ourselves Christians must be Christians. Today we ask for the strength to approach our problems and attackers in a way that promotes love that promotes the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

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