

## Commentary to the Baptism of Jesus Sunday



### The Baptism of the Lord: Continuing the

#### Mission

We end the Christmas Season and begin the Season of Ordinary Time with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord by John the Baptist.

Why was Jesus baptized by John? Certainly, He was not a sinner who needed to repent like so many of the others whom John baptized. The Fourth Eucharistic Prayer reminds us that Jesus shared our human nature in all things but sin. John himself said that Jesus should be baptizing him, not he baptizing Jesus. So, why did Jesus go into the River Jordan and let John baptize him?

Perhaps the question can be answered by asking, “Why did people respond to John’s invitation to be baptized?” They wanted the presence of God to be restored to the world and they knew that first it had to be restored in them. They wanted evil to be defeated and knew that first they had to defeat evil within themselves. They wanted the Kingdom of God to begin, and they were baptized to proclaim this Kingdom with their lives.

Jesus joined them in their desires for the Kingdom of God. He saw the pain that godlessness brought to mankind, and wanted to be united to all who sought God. He saw the results of sin in the world and

wanted to be united to all who would fight sin. He knew that the Kingdom of God was beginning and sought union with all were willing to make a commitment to the Kingdom.

And John pointed to Jesus and said, “Look, there is the Lamb of God.” There is the one who will take the horrors of the world upon Himself, and die for God’s people.

When Jesus was baptized He accepted the Mission that was the whole reason why He became a man. He began His public ministry which would end in the destruction of sin and hate with obedience to the Father and love for His people. Jesus embraced His Mission, defeated the devil, established the Kingdom of God, and then called on each of us to continue His ministry, more than that, to complete His ministry.

This reminds me of the famous story about the completion of Giacomo Puccini’s opera, Turandot. Puccini was one of the greatest composers of opera of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. La Bohème, Tosca and Madame Butterfly are just a few of his most famous works. His final work was the opera, Turandot. He knew he was dying when he started writing Turandot and almost completed it, but he passed away before he finished the final act. Puccini had many students and associates who gathered around his deathbed. They made up their minds that they would complete Turandot as an expression of their esteem for the great composer. It didn’t happen all at once, it took a number of years, but finally they finished the task. The opera debuted at one of the most famous theaters in the world, La Scala in Milan. It was conducted by the former pupil of Puccini, Arturo Toscanini. The music was beautiful and the audience was spellbound. Then in the middle of the Third Act, after the great aria, Nessun Dormo, Toscanini laid down his baton, turned to the people and announced, “It is at this point that the Master died.” You could have heard a pin drop. Then Toscanini looked at the audience and said, “But his disciples continued his work in his Spirit.” Toscanini turned back to the stage and completed the opera to the thunderous applause of all at La Scala.

We are called to continue the Mission of the Jesus Christ in His Spirit, His Holy Spirit. We are determined to complete the work of the Master. We do this through our vocations to the married life, to parenthood, to the priesthood, to religious life, or to the life of the committed Catholic single.

When we love others, we are continuing His Mission, for He is the Tremendous Lover.

When we develop and use the particular gifts He has given to each of us to make the world beautiful

for others, we are continuing His Mission.

When those of you who are married put your spouse before yourselves, you are continuing His Mission to make love the motivation of life.

When those of you who have children empty yourselves so your children can grow into the reflections of God He created them to be, you are continuing His Mission.

When we strive to be the best at whatever it is that He calls us to do in our careers, we are continuing His Mission.

When we say “No!” to sin and “Yes” to care for all who are hurting, we are continuing His Mission.

When we make time to be kind to those whom our society hates, the downtrodden, the socially unacceptable, the butt of jokes at school, at work, in the community, we are continuing His Mission.

When we respond to the Grace to do something for someone else, we are continuing His Mission.

When we realize with our lives that we are not the center of the universe, but that Jesus is the Center, and our center, we are continuing His Mission.

“You are my Beloved Son. With you I am well pleased.” This was the voice of the Father over the Son after Jesus was baptized by John. The Father was pleased that Jesus embraced His Mission. He is pleased when we continue Christ’s Mission.

What a gift we have been given in Jesus Christ. Some people think that life is meaningless, without purpose. But we Christians know why we were created and how we can live meaningful lives. We can make a difference in the world by uniting ourselves to the One who changed the world with His

Life. We can continue the Mission of Jesus Christ.

Fr. Joseph Pellegrino, SJ