



ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

The Church in Central and Southern Indiana

Leadership Briefing

By Archbishop Charles C. Thompson

Jesus is the Father's beloved Son, the gift of the Holy Spirit

If you listen carefully during the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord on January 9, you'll hear a subtle—but very powerful—interpretation of what happened when Jesus was baptized by John in the River Jordan. What the Gospel reading says is:

After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (cf. Lk 3:21–22).



St. Luke's account of this great miracle is straightforward, almost matter-of-fact. But this Sunday's entrance antiphon and the Alleluia verse before the Gospel both say that the voice of the Father *thundered*: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17). In a booming voice, St. Matthew tells us, as the Holy Spirit descended like a dove, the Father proclaimed his immense pride in Jesus, his only Son.

This remarkable scene, the baptism of the Lord, is a manifestation of the Holy Trinity at work in our world. God appears as the thunderous voice of the Father, as the humble, beloved Son who did not need to be baptized but who freely chose to do so as a sign of his oneness with us, and as the gentle-but-powerful Spirit who hovered over Jesus in the form of a dove to support and encourage him. What a graced moment! Truly God is with us here in the fullness of his divinity and in his closeness to us, his people.

In the second reading for this Sunday (Acts 10:34-38), St. Peter tells us that God's love is intended for everyone. "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-35). We dare not impose limits on God's mercy, or act as if we can predict who will be rewarded on the last

day. Salvation is not limited to a few elite believers. It is open to all provided that they fear God and act justly.

Jesus was baptized with water by John the Baptist, but St. Peter tells us that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power” (Acts 10:38). Jesus received his power to heal the sick, comfort the afflicted, forgive sins and redeem us from the finality of death, not from any human power but from his Father and the Holy Spirit. The mystery of the triune God is revealed in the sacramental sign of Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan. Following this graced moment, St. Peter says, Jesus “went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him” (Acts 10:38).

As we learn in Sunday’s first reading, all this was to fulfill what the prophet Isaiah foretold long before this dramatic scene in the Jordan River:

Thus says the Lord. Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations, not crying out, not shouting, not making his voice heard in the street. A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench, until he establishes justice on the Earth, the coastlands will wait for his teaching (Is 42:1-4).

The Father’s voice may have been thunderous, but the Son will not cry out, shout or make his voice heard in the street. He will quietly do whatever is necessary to serve as “a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness” (Is 42:6-7). Anointed by the Holy Spirit and empowered by the Father’s love and blessing, Jesus begins his ministry among us as a man of peace determined to establish justice for all nations and people everywhere.

As we begin a new calendar year and next week begin again what the Church calls “ordinary time,” it’s good to be reminded of Jesus’ mission. His baptism by John was an inaugural event, the beginning of his public ministry, but it wasn’t something he did all by himself. God was with him (and in him) in the fullness of the Holy Trinity. Because of this unique manifestation of Jesus’ divinity and his closeness to us (his humanity), we can be confident that by following him patiently we will one day share in his justice and peace.

Let’s pray for the grace to listen attentively to God’s “thunderous voice” this weekend, and let’s ask the Holy Spirit to help us follow Jesus on our synodal journey as he leads us on the way of life.

+Charles C. Thompson
Archbishop of Indianapolis

Synod prayer

We stand before You, Holy Spirit, as we gather together in Your name.

With You alone to guide us, make Yourself at home in our hearts;

Teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it.

We are weak and sinful; do not let us promote disorder.

Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path nor partiality influence our actions.

Let us find in You our unity so that we may journey together to eternal life and not stray from the way of truth and what is right.

All this we ask of You, who are at work in every place and time, in the communion of the Father and the Son, forever and ever.

Amen.



A Message from Pope Francis: Words of Challenge and Hope

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This year's liturgy [2020] offers us the event of the Baptism of Jesus according to the Gospel of Matthew (cf. 3:13-17). The Evangelist describes the dialogue between Jesus who asks to be baptized and John the Baptist who wants to prevent him and observes: "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" (v. 14). This decision by Jesus surprises the Baptist: in fact, the Messiah does not need to be purified; indeed, he is the one who purifies. But God is Holy. His ways are not ours and Jesus is God's path, an unpredictable path. Let us remember that God is the God of surprises.



John had stated that there was an abyssal, unbridgeable difference between him and Jesus. I am not worthy to carry his sandals (cf. Mt 3:11), he had said. But the Son of God came precisely to fill this gap between man and God. If Jesus is completely on God's side, he is also completely on the side of mankind and he reunites what was divided. This is why he answers John: "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (v. 15). The Messiah asks to be baptized so that all righteousness be fulfilled, that God's design which passes through filial obedience and solidarity with fragile and sinful mankind, be fulfilled. It is the path of humility and of God's complete closeness to his children.

The prophet Isaiah also announces the righteousness of the Servant of God who fulfills his mission in the world with a style that is opposed to the worldly spirit. "He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard on the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench" (42:2-3). It is the attitude of meekness — the attitude of simplicity, of respect, of moderation and of hiddenness that is still asked today of the Lord's disciples. How many — it is sad to say — how many of the Lord's disciples boast that they are disciples of the Lord. Those who boast are not good disciples of the Lord. The good disciple is humble, meek, one who does good unobtrusively. In missionary work, the Christian community is called to approach others always offering and not imposing, bearing witness, sharing the concrete life of the people.

As soon as Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit alighted on him like a dove, as a voice from heaven said: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17). We rediscover our own Baptism in the Feast of the Baptism. Just as Jesus is the Beloved Son of the Father, we too, reborn by water and the Holy Spirit, know we are loved children — the Father loves us all! —, the object of God's satisfaction, brothers and sisters of many brothers and sisters, assigned with a great mission to bear witness and proclaim the Father's boundless love to all mankind.

This Feast of the Baptism of Jesus reminds us of our own Baptism. We too were reborn in Baptism. In Baptism the Holy Spirit came down to remain within us. This is why it is important to know the date of our Baptism. We know our date of birth, but we do not always know the date of our Baptism. Certainly, some of you do not know it.... Homework to do: when you return [home] ask: when was I baptized? When was I baptized? And celebrate the date of your Baptism in your heart, every year. Do it. This also does justice to the Lord who was so kind to us.

(Selected from Pope Francis's Angelus message, January 12, 2020)

My Prayer for You

Let's pray in the words of Pope Francis that the Blessed Virgin Mary will guide us on our synodal journey:

May Mary Most Holy help us to increasingly understand the gift of Baptism and to live it consistently in everyday situations.

+ Charles C. Thompson