

The Baptism of the Lord – 01-10-2021

“Thus says the Lord; All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money...come without paying and without cost...”

“Let the scoundrel forsake his way, and the wicked man his thoughts, let him turn to the Lord for mercy; to our God, who is generous and forgiving.”

I once heard a story of a priest who gave a homily on the baptism of a well-known New York mob boss. He said, he was approached by two very large men in suits who told him that Mr. so and so wanted to see him and he wanted to him now. So he said, he got into their vehicle and they took him for a ride.

This priest recognized the mob boss's name and his men told him that he was dying. He also discovered that he believed that he had never been baptized.

The mob boss admitted to the priest that he had led a very bad life and he wanted to be reconciled to God.

Father was a bit skeptical of his claim that he had never been baptized. It would have been very rare for an Italian not to have been baptized as an infant. He said just watch the Godfather if you don't believe him.

Most of us are baptized as infants at a time when we are not guilty of any personal sin so baptism only takes away original sin and bestows grace on us to live a good Catholic life in the future.

But since it was possible that this mob boss had not been baptized and since his motives seemed authentic the priest went ahead and baptized him.

Of course since a person can only be baptized once the baptism was conditional, based on whether he had been baptized before or not, something which at this point only God knew for certain.

That was important because baptism takes away all sin – not just original sin – and all punishment due to sin. That means that this mob boss, if he had not previously been baptized and he managed to avoid sin after his baptism, would go directly to heaven upon his death.

When the priest explained this to him he said in amazement that just doesn't seem quite fair.

Maybe it doesn't seem quite fair to us either but if this scoundrel really hadn't been baptized and if this wicked man really did forsake his ways and his thoughts and if he really did turn to the Lord for mercy; to our God, who is generous and forgiving then that is exactly what happened.

That's the power of baptism. However, I would not suggest to anyone who has not been baptized to wait until they are on their deathbed because they probably won't be so fortunate.

In the gospel today we heard of the baptism of Jesus by John. However, Jesus' baptism wasn't a baptism of repentance.

Jesus is God. He had nothing to repent of. He didn't have any sins to be washed away. Jesus is the very source baptismal grace.

When Jesus was baptized he touched the waters of the Jordan. In so doing He sanctified the waters of the whole world to become the instrument of human regeneration in Christ.

And now every time someone is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, is unleashed into that person's life and they become sons and daughters of the living God.

In the early Church obviously the first converts were adults so adults were naturally being baptized.

But we have explicit mention of infant baptism by Tertullian around 220 AD and by the year 400 AD under the advocacy of Saint Augustine it was fast becoming the norm in the Church.

Even Jesus was brought to the temple and circumcised as an infant eight days after his birth. That was the Hebrew custom of claiming a male child for the Lord and so we follow this tradition of bringing our infants to the baptismal fount to claim for the Lord.

Nobody has a right to baptism. Nobody can earn the gifts that flow from the holy fount. But this grace was given to all of us anyway.

The heavens were torn open and the Spirit descended upon us as a voice from the heavens declared, you are my beloved son or daughter, with whom I am well pleased.

Today, let's consider our own baptisms and forsake any old way that still clings to us and, like the mob boss, turn to the Lord for His mercy and forgiveness.