



Contributed by Bro. John Cline, C.R.

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**BAPTISM OF THE LORD
January 10th, 2021**

GATHERING TIME (10-15 minutes)

Introduction to the Word:

We have in our country an embarrassing situation. And it has gone on for many years. It affects our brothers and sisters in some northern communities pertaining to ordinary everyday life. What many of us take for granted, these Indigenous folks fear for their safety. For without first boiling the water from their taps, they risk compromising their health. For one particular community, they have had to move to a bigger centre where families are crowded into hotel rooms, since an oil film has been detected on their water.

We all understand the importance of water, and have experienced a strong thirst on a hot summer's day. We can appreciate the longing created in a desert journey or being marooned on a deserted island surrounded by salt water. We may have insight into another thirst in our society. Our culture entices us with its plethora of consumer goods, advertising, and promises of satisfying some hunger. And it is so easy to be distracted by screens, shopping, and restless activity that they can obscure a *spiritual* thirst. That subtle inner longing was first addressed for many of us when our parents brought us to the font of baptismal water. And baptism is the focus of our gospel today as Jesus, the carpenter's son, approaches John, the baptizer.

Warm-up Activity (about 8-10 minutes):

- a) Do you have any photos of your baptism? Have any stories been handed down?
- b) If you were asked to identify one or more of your "major successes," (i.e. accomplishments, challenges, or artistic endeavours) in your lifetime thus far, what might they be?
- c) What one thing would you like to do or accomplish before you die?

The Table of the Word

“Baptismal Mission”

Jesus’ private life ends on the banks of the Jordan River with His public baptism and a new chapter begins. The Christmas season also ends, and the church moves to Ordinary Time. The term ‘ordinary’ can be a little misleading, as we follow in the church’s calendar the ordinary (and some miraculous) events as Jesus carries out His mission. The adult Jesus teaches, heals, and provides an example as He journeys to Jerusalem. Today the same Spirit that anointed Jesus for His mission empowers all of us, baptized in that same Spirit, to take up our own mission. That mission in this New Year is, in effect, a continuation of Jesus’ own: to seek and find the lost; to attend to the sick and the aged; to rebuild relationships in our families and communities; and in time, to bring God’s justice and peace to people everywhere. And so, as we reflect on our baptism and anointing, we are invited to reflect and pray on how the Spirit is guiding us each day in the ordinary events of our lives.

Leader: Born again of water and the Holy Spirit, we celebrate our victory over sin.

Lord Jesus, you invite all nations into your Kingdom, **Lord, have mercy.**

Christ Jesus, you free us from our sins, **Christ, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, you share with us your own divine life, **Lord, have mercy.**

Let us pray (together)

O heavenly Father,

as we celebrate today the mystery of Jesus’ baptism in the river Jordan,

renew in us our own baptism: Pattern our lives on this Christ,

the One you have specially chosen, the One on whom your favour rests,

the Beloved with whom you are well pleased.

We ask this through Jesus, your Son and our brother. Amen.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME *(45 minutes)*

*(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today. The dynamic of the Small Christian Community, namely, reflecting on our life story within the context of this Word, and sharing the insights of these reflections, is such that God’s Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life giving. Because it is a privileged time it is incumbent on us in the small group to proclaim God’s Word with due reverence, to be attentive to this proclamation, and respectful of the communal interaction. The facilitator has arranged for group members to proclaim the three readings.)*

FIRST READING (Isaiah 55:1-11)

Thus says the Lord: “Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. “See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.

See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

“Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked person forsake their way, and the unrighteous person their thoughts; let that person return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the one who eats, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (1 John 5:1-9)

Beloved: Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth. There are three that testify: the spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Mark 1:7-11)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In his preaching he proclaimed, “*The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*”

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

And a voice came from Heaven, “*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.*”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

(Allow 5 – 10 minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection on a meaningful word or thought)

COMMENTARY:

The author of Isaiah describes God’s incredible invitation to His people, leaving captivity to invest their lives in things that provide lasting satisfaction. That investment is with God, and it is a gift that cannot be purchased. What is presented is an offer of pure grace. God has something priceless to offer, but God intentionally sets a price that everyone can afford—*free!* The only requirement is that we respond to the invitation—that we “come, buy and eat!” The arrogant or

self-satisfied cannot attain it. God wants to provide what is needed and is seeking the lost, the sinner, and calling God's people to peace and rejoicing. This is too precious to have a price tag.

In our gospel account, Jesus moves from His private life and publicly approaches John, who has left his private life in the wilderness to publicly preach repentance. Jesus comes to the Jordan waters to join in solidarity with sinful humanity and identify with those at the river seeking to draw closer to God. His moment of decision receives an affirmation from heaven. His identity is furthered through this approval as the Son of God. And this assurance proclaims His saving mission as Messiah and the Holy Spirit equips Him to preach a loving God.

How do we, like those gathered at the Jordan, draw closer to God? Fr. Richard Rohr writes, "If your religious practice is nothing more than to remain sincerely open to the ongoing challenges of life and love, you will find God—and also yourself. Keeping the heart spaces and the mind spaces open, sometimes even in 'hell', is the essential work of spirituality" (*The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*).

In St. Mark's account, God the Father leaves no doubt in the mind of those present—and Jesus—that this is "His Son, the Beloved", and that "His favour rested with Him". Although intellectually we know that we "belong" to God through our Baptism, it is not always easy for us to truly feel that. Some people doubt this love relationship, and feel unworthy, because if God knows all about them, all their innermost thoughts and feelings, how can God love them? Especially when we experience that other people do not love us, because of things we say and do, it is natural we would doubt that God would love us. However, God is God, and is not limited by our human logic, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways, says the Lord". God's love is unconditional and a free gift. We do not 'earn' it, it is ours because God created us. God assures us that we are loved, and we are loveable, and that we in turn are called to love.

This, then, is our baptismal mission: to love. We humans **are so much more** than what we allow ourselves to be. We slowly become aware of "who I really am". Our human, and therefore limited, powers of cognition have difficulty grasping the fullness of these basic beliefs: the fact that we are made to God's image; that we are empowered by God's Spirit; that we share God's own life; that God has made us partners in God's plan and mission for the world. John, in our second reading, says, "everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ [the anointed one, the Messiah] has been born of God ... conquers the world". Thus, we are missioned to make this love active.

Psychologists and therapists tell us how important it is for people to receive positive reinforcement. This is particularly true of children, although no matter what our age or position in life, it is still a need we all have—to feel appreciated, loved, and valued. A child who constantly hears "You are an idiot," "You are a lame excuse for a daughter/son," or the like, will come to believe this, especially when it comes from an adult. This is particularly damaging when it comes from an adult who is "supposed to" love them. This not only eats away at the confidence of the child, but often can result in them responding to situations in a way that fulfills what the person (parent, teacher, coach, etc.) is thinking of them. Unfortunately, this negativity can still be active when we are adults, with damaging consequences. Too often we will remember the criticism, but will forget the praise we have received. Someone said that for every negative comment the person needs five positive comments to balance this in their own mind. Sometimes people think that their words do not have any influence or power, but this is not the case. Words and actions, or lack of action, can be very demoralizing to persons and groups. Opinions, labels, remarks, have the potential to diminish, stereotype and keep others down or

held back. Our words can leave deep wounds in others, just as they can affirm the other, encourage and recognize with satisfaction who they are and what they do. The words of the Father at the Baptism of Jesus give us an example of how to speak up and express what the other person means to us, and how we treasure them and are grateful for their part in our life. It is not enough to *think* it, but we need to put expression to it by our words. It is not even enough to think, “Well, I do this for them”. That helps, but we all want to *hear* it.

(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or a new idea.)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. “...with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11)

These words were spoken by God the Father of Jesus, at the time of Jesus’ baptism. And because of Jesus, the same words are spoken to us—challenging words that await our response.

- a) Reflect briefly on your activities this day, then name a few things you have done that would probably be pleasing to God. (Know that the Lord is happy when you boast in His name).
- b) Name a few projects you *observed* being done by others that would be pleasing to God.
- c) Name a few needs in your neighbourhood and larger region that cry out for attention and action.

2. The dove’s presence at Jesus’ baptism signals the beginning of a *new creation*—Jesus is making His official debut on the world’s stage. This image is considered one of the central images of the redemptive *mystery*.

- a) Most of us are not comfortable with the notion of *mystery*. Take a few moments to identify a few of life’s mysteries that you find most stunning.
- b) If you ever get the opportunity, which is the one mystery you would want “solved?”
- c) Life has its own “little” mysteries: comment briefly on one or more of the following sayings (little mysteries) that we experience every day:
 - Why do the rich get richer and the poor get poorer?
 - Why do we seem to hurt the ones we love?
 - Why do bad things happen to good people?
 - Why does God favour the poorest and the weakest?
 - Why do we act contrary to what we know is right?

3. John poured the water and God sent the Spirit. This is the usual way the sacrament works—cooperation between God and us mortal men and women. **We perform the sign and God provides the grace.** There is cooperation here—a team effort is required. Alice Camille reminds us that our cooperation in the “grace-event” is a very important part of the story, but one we commonly fail to understand or appreciate. We seem to be waiting for God to do all the work, while we sit on our hands doing little (*God’s Word is Alive*, 1998).

- a) Talk about how some of us might be “sitting on our hands” in regard to accepting responsibilities for ministry in our parish communities.
- b) It has been observed that some of the most active parishes in our country do not have a resident priest, yet the parish is thriving. What can we learn from this? Share your views.

- c) What needs do you identify in your church that are not being met? What more could be done for individuals or a group?

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. The intent is to 'outreach' to the larger community. The facilitator should allow for a **moderate pause** between each of the numbered suggestions for reflection and action.)

1. Word for the Week:

Reflect often on these words this week and consider them spoken to you as they were to Jesus:
“This is my Son/Daughter, the beloved, in whom I am well pleased”

2. Suggestion for the Week:

Is there something in your life you might be resisting, the pursuit of a dream, or allowing a wound to heal? Give in for now. Let God take you where the Spirit is prompting.

3. Intercessions: (Response: Lord, hear our prayer)

Leader: In prayer let us call on God who draws near to us in Christ, the Beloved One, on whom God's Spirit rests.

Jesus, you embraced our humanity totally; help us to live your gospel and so transform our lives, we pray...

Lord, Saviour, you listened to the Spirit and were covered in Jordan's waters; give us a spirit of reverence that we may heal and encourage one another, we pray...

May all who are baptized into the everlasting covenant conquer the world by faith and transform it by love, we pray...

That those estranged from God and from the community may forsake their ways and return to the God of mercy who abundantly pardons, we pray...

Lord, you encouraged John when he doubted, strengthen educators and those leading sacramental preparation programs, we pray ...

That those unsatisfied by material gain, may thirst for fulfillment in seeking the “Bread of Life,” Jesus our Saviour, we pray...

Lord, you listened to the Spirit and carried out a ministry of teaching and healing; bless all who are suffering and dying, and enfold them in your mercy, we pray...

Let us pray (together)

O Holy One of Israel, to the waters you call all those who thirst. As once at the Jordan your Spirit tore open the heavens, and your voice proclaimed Jesus your well-beloved Son, so now call us by name, your beloved sons and daughters. Lead us by your Spirit, so that our love for you may strengthen us to follow your inspirations, and our love for one another be the victory that forever conquers the world. We ask this through Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us—your Son who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever. Amen.

OUR FATHER...

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. ([Celebrating the Word](#) was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R., deceased 2012). The Scripture version used in this commentary is the [New Revised Standard Version](#) (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).
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