

**January 10<sup>th</sup> 2021 – The Baptism of the Lord**      **Mark 1:4-11**

### Baptized for Life

Apparently, this Dove likes water. Well, not too surprising, if you have ever been to Venice, to Rome, or some other European city with fountains or channels. Doves would bath in the fountains with a keen eye on the silly tourists who feed them.

So, this dove, too, likes water. Before creation, the Holy Spirit was over the waters and in the Baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit Dove did not mind to come down onto the wet Jesus who just came back out from the river Jordan. Later, the Holy Spirit was often identified with fire. I wonder how that influenced the Spirit's relationship with water.

The Baptism of Jesus is no easy topic in theology. Why was he baptized? The Church confesses Jesus as fully human, but without sin. Fully human, but never far from God. Why should he endure a baptism of repentance?

Was it because Jesus wanted to institute this rite as a rite of initiation for his followers? That would make John's Baptism the prototype of our Baptism.

Or was Jesus, as a human being with a special relationship to God from his childhood, still discerning his own vocation and his Baptism was an important step in this journey of discernment? He saw the heavens torn apart and heard God's voice from heaven, calling him God's beloved child.

If that was the case, then, that would explain why he went into the wilderness for forty days right after his Baptism. Who wouldn't need some time in solitude and prayer after hearing God's voice sounding from heaven and calling you the beloved child?

Either way, as the Baptism was one important step in Jesus' ministry, so it is an important step for us and our spiritual life.

Old Churches were often built in a way that you entered in the West. Right after the main portal, you find the baptismal font. The churches were meant to be symbols of a different world, a different realm. You entered that realm as you enter life by being born. The main doors being the symbol for a human's birth.

The font right after, symbolising the baptism of a person, that moment when the already existing covenant and bond between a human being and their creator is made complete by the human consent. From there, the person walks hand in hand with God, step by step, towards the East, the altar and the rising sun.

However, the journey after baptism can have loops, lead sideways, South and North. The promise is that God's hand always follows you even when a person lets go of that hand.

What baptism does not promise is that we don't drop a lot of plates while making our way through the nave of the church. We hurt people on the way, we hurt ourselves, we make wrong decisions that have impacts on us, our family or even more people.

For some people, being baptized does not prevent them from encouraging civil war like scenes in their country. Or if we look closer, being baptized does not prevent us from our new favorite national sports: being judgemental. Colleagues from other denominations on the North Shore tell me how neighbours look through their church windows every Sunday when they film their live-stream, counting the number of people present and pondering whether they can call the police or not.

CBC posted a note that people should stop calling 911 to discriminate their neighbours for a break of current health orders and if you read the headlines a little while ago I got the feeling that our young folks were the biggest villains because they were eager to kill their grannies, while, as a matter of fact, the big majority of young folks obey the rules. But it is easy to live in a 4 bedroom house with garden and to judge people who live in studios and shared accommodation for not staying inside more.

Baptism does not prevent us from being self-righteous and judgemental but it equips us with a tool box and we get the choice whether we want to learn how to use this tool box. It needs a lot of practice and there will be a lot of broken things before one learns to master some of the tools. Others decide to leave the tool box in the corner and only to pin the sign of the tool box to their jacket; labelling themselves as tool box owners.

But if used with patience, perseverance and mutual support, a person can accomplish miracles with these tools.

In these times when we cannot meet as usual as a praying community, the presence of this tool box is important and maybe these strange days give us the time to, actually, explore these tools a bit more and practice them so that we grow in spirituality and awareness of God's presence in our lives.

That is the gift of the Spirit. Whether it is symbolized as a dove, a flame of fire or a toolbox. The Spirit in us is a potential to grow beyond oneself, but we need to use it and always to try to return to the center aisle of the Church to continue our path eastward. Step by step.