

Thoughts from the Second Floor Front
The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord
January 13, 2019

In scratching together this column each week, I tend to reflect on the Liturgy of the Word from the Mass of the Sunday on which the column appears. I am thinking of stepping away from that rigorous attachment and engage in some catechesis each week. The structure would be selecting a specific topic and explore and explain that in terms of its basic meaning in our life of faith. Again, not so much tying in the readings from Mass but perhaps touching on them as best as I could; given the context of the column's topic that week. The first topic of the series this year is the sacraments; spending two weeks on each. That would bring us to about the Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time; ending the structure somewhere around the end of July. I used to love teaching the Sacraments in high school and even in an introductory theology course I taught to First Collegians at the seminary.

Our Sacramental system is essential to our life of faith. Each one is a most significant event on our journey of faith, reaching the highest and most important sacrament, the Most Holy Eucharist. Of the Eucharist the Fathers of Vatican Council II wrote of it as "the source and summit of our faith." (Lumen Gentium § 134, CCC § 1324). The term sacrament (*sacramentum*) existed in Roman society before the Church co-opted it. It was a second century Roman Lawyer and philosopher Tertullian who was among the first to apply the term to our ecclesial gatherings. St. Paul would have no understanding of the term in its use as Tertullian did. St. Paul would have spoken of the *mysterium*, with which he would include preaching, teaching, healing, prophesying and a host of other actions on behalf of the church.

St. Augustine probably made among the most significant contributions to sacramental theology through his preaching and writing. Do you remember the definition of sacrament that you were taught in grade school? A sacrament is an outward sign, instituted by Christ, to give Grace. St. Augustine wrote of a sacrament being a visible sign of an invisible grace. In his opening address at second session of Vatican Council II Pope St. Paul VI spoke of a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God.

Providentially, today's feast fits in rather well with the new plan. While today marks the official liturgical end of the Christmas Season what we celebrate on this day, Baptism, marks a beginning. The beginning of our life of faith. Our tradition is to practice infant baptism. There was a day when infant mortality would pressure people to baptize babies almost immediately after birth. With our emphasis on familial faith and the family as a domestic church the baptism of infants is entirely consistent with who we are and what we believe. Parents want what is best for their children. It is a matter of both faith and logic that parents would want to share the faith with their child as a truly elemental aspect of their life of faith.

Baptism does three things for us: forgives original sin, establishes us as a member of the Body of Christ, the Church and is a source of Grace. That is why we were baptized.

Why then was Jesus baptized? Jesus did not suffer from original sin. He is not established as a member of the Body of Christ. His is the Body of Christ. Jesus does not need Grace. Jesus is the source of Grace. So then why? Some spiritual writers assert that Jesus submitted Himself for Baptism as an example to His disciples; and that includes us. The explanation I favor is that for Jesus His baptism, as it does for us was for Him a beginning. He began the public ministry after emerging from the waters of the Jordan. He went about fulfilling the will of the Father.

For us too, our baptism marks a beginning. More on that next week. In the meantime, you might want to read something on baptism. Check out CCC § 1210 to § 1274.

Faithfully,
Msgr. Diamond