

On Sunday, we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, which ends the Christmas liturgical season. Our Gospel account of Jesus' Baptism comes from Matthew. Matthew's account is the only one that has an exchange between Jesus and John the Baptist. When Jesus comes to the Jordan River to be baptized, John says, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?" But Jesus replies, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

There is some debate about why Jesus chooses to be baptized, since He had no need of repentance. The answer that makes the most sense to me is humility. On Christmas Day, we celebrated the fact that the Son of God humbled Himself to become one of us, and so Mary gave birth to Jesus. On Good Friday, we will remember in a special way that Jesus humbled Himself to die for us on the Cross. Every time we celebrate Mass, we share in the sacrifice that Jesus made for us. Here, at the Jordan, Jesus humbles Himself once again. He has no need of repentance for Himself, but in being baptized, He shows us the way to humility and repentance.

In a very real way, baptism is an act of humility. In being baptized, we acknowledge our need to be washed free of original sin. We acknowledge that following Jesus is better than following ourselves. But this is not humility marked by sadness. Rather, we have joy, knowing that we are loved so much that the Son of God offered Himself for us. This is not humility marked by isolation. In baptism, we are joined to a community of brothers and sisters, "sinners" and "saints," who also strive to holiness.

And this is not humility marked by inaction. In baptism we are claimed for Christ, and we take on the mission given to us as disciples. Being humble, however, influences *how* we fulfill our mission as followers of Christ. If we are humble enough to know our own need for repentance, it is easier to withhold judgment of others. Listen to the words of Isaiah from our first reading, as he describes the attitude of the Servant of the Lord: "A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench." For me, this describes Jesus' relationship with us. He does not give up on us, or dismiss us as unworthy. He does not seek to condemn, but to save. When we look at the political atmosphere today, or the violence committed by extremists, or even popular culture on so-called "reality" shows, not breaking a "bruised reed," or not snuffing out a "smoldering wick," seems almost out of place. But as out of place as it may be, following Jesus in humility and meekness (I didn't say "weakness!") is our call. Peter in our reading from Acts, has it right: "I see that God shows no partiality."

The world needs more humility, not less. There is need for more non-violence, not less. Baptized in Christ, anointed in the Spirit, we are called to be humble servants, knowing we are God's beloved, and seeking to be those with whom He is "well pleased."

May God continue to bless us all, and guide us into the New Year.

In Christ,

Fr. Phil, CP