

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS (St. Mark 1 v 7 – 11) - 10TH January 2021

At His Baptism in the River Jordan, the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus in the form of a Dove. Jesus is “empowered” by the Holy Spirit and following His Baptism, Jesus “full of the Holy Spirit” (St. Luke 4 v 1) is “led by the Holy Spirit” into the wilderness for forty days after which Jesus returns to Galilee “in the power of the Holy Spirit”(v14). Thus we see how important is the Work of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnate Life of Jesus.

As we prayerfully reflect on the Baptism of Jesus, we can profitably ponder three aspects of His Baptism.

Firstly, the Baptism of Jesus marks the beginning of His Public Ministry. In the waters of the Jordan, Jesus – Who had no need of repentance and therefore no need of a baptism for repentance, so that John the Baptist would have prevented Jesus being baptised (St. Mark 3 v 14) – in the waters of the Jordan, Jesus nevertheless identifies Himself with and (as it were, “symbolically”) takes up from the waters (and carries) those sins as though they were His Own and takes them to Calvary suffering the consequences of our sins in His Own Death on the Cross. “He bore our sins in His Body on the Tree” (1 Peter 2 v 24). “He came to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3 v 5). “ He appeared, once for all, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Hebrews 9 v 26). Thus Jesus identifies Himself with sin at His Baptism at the beginning of His Public Ministry and at His Baptism at the end of His Public Ministry for it is clear that His Death is also a baptism (St. Luke 12 v 50; St. Mark 10 v 39), so that His Public Ministry begins and ends in Baptism, and it is precisely at His Baptism in the Jordan that John the Baptist first reveals this vocation of Jesus, taken from the waters of the Jordan, when he declares, “ Behold! The Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!” (St. John 1 v 29,36).

Secondly, someone might ask, “If Jesus Himself is the Eternal Word of God made Flesh, the Second Person of the Holy and Blessed Trinity, why does He need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy and blessed Trinity? Do we not affirm that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are co-equal in Nature, in Dignity, in Will and in Power?”. We believe that in the Incarnation the Eternal Word of God “assumed” (or “took” or “joined” to Himself) the nature, the soul, the body of our humanity in the Womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary but that in union with His Divine Person there was no “mingling” or confusion of His Two Natures. There was a “marriage” of His Two Natures but no loss of distinct identity in His Two Natures. At the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the Holy Spirit did not come down upon (and empower) His Divine Nature but upon the Human Nature, Soul and Body of Jesus. It would seem that during the first thirty years of His Incarnation Jesus did not exercise His Divine Power (through His Human Nature) but waited (cf. Acts 1 v 4) until His Sacred Humanity was empowered by the Holy Spirit at His Baptism. In this He led the way for us, not only by His Baptism in water (heralding the Sacrament of Baptism) but also in His Anointing by the Holy Spirit (heralding the Sacrament of Confirmation).

Thus, thirdly, having received the Holy Spirit, Jesus (as our Head) becomes the One Who baptises His Body (the Church) in the Holy Spirit. The anointing flows down from the Head over His Body. “ I baptise you with water” says St. John the Baptist, “ but He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit” (St. Mark 1 v 8). The Church first experienced this “ baptism in the Holy Spirit” on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2 v 1 – 4) but the Holy Spirit continued to be poured out upon the Church (Acts 8 v 17, 10 v 44) “ as at the beginning” (11 v 15) and throughout the history of the Church there have been further outpourings of the Holy Spirit in addition to, and supplementing, or anticipating, the “sealing” of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1 v 13, 4 v 30; 2 Corinthians 1 v 22) in the Sacrament of Confirmation, just as New Birth may precede it’s “ completion” in the “sealing” of the Sacrament of Baptism or (in the case of an unrepentant adult) follow later after a later act of repentance/conversion.

For these reasons we have been praying for many months, indeed over several years, and we continue to pray, that the Lord will grant to us, and to the whole Church throughout the world, that “ New Pentecost” for which Pope St. John XXIII prayed at the opening of the Second Vatican Council. More than ever, we pray that these difficult days through which we are passing will lead us to days of great blessing, days of restoration and renewal, with a new hunger and a new vision, and a desire (strengthened through adversity) for a deeper consecration to the life of faith, and a more faithful discipleship of Christ so that through the trials and tribulations of the present time we may come through to Resurrection and a New Pentecost, “Risen and Ascended Lord Jesus, baptise us in the Holy Spirit! Come, Holy Spirit! Come, Lord Jesus!”.

“ Renew Your wonders in this our day, as by a New Pentecost. Grant to Your Church that being of one mind and steadfast in prayer with Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and following the lead of Blessed Peter, she may advance the reign of our Divine Saviour, the reign of truth and justice, the reign of love and peace. Come Holy Spirit, in Your power and might to renew the face of the earth. Amen” (Pope St. John XXIII).