

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,**

**Has it occurred to you how the Church has structured our worship around the life of Christ? Just a few weeks ago we celebrated his birth. Last week we remembered his revelation to the nations in the visitation of the Magi. Today, we are called to reflect on his Baptism by John. By March we will begin the season of Lent and join him on his journey to Jerusalem where he will suffer and die. In April we will celebrate his Resurrection from the dead. By the end of May we will recall his Ascension to the Father, and come June we will rejoice in the outpouring of His Spirit on the Feast of Pentecost.**

**Mmmh! I wonder if that's why so many stop coming to Church in July and August, figuring the story has ended? I don't know. That's just a thought that occurred to me.**

**Today our Gospel invites us to reflect on this Baptismal moment in the life of Christ. It's importance in salvation history cannot be overstated insofar as it is the only place in the whole Bible that the confluence of the Trinity of the Persons of God is manifested—Jesus, “the Holy Spirit...in bodily form like a dove”, and the Voice of the Father, “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.”**

**Following his Baptism, the ministry of Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth, begins. Anointed with the Spirit, Jesus begins the work of his life, which pleases God, his Father.**

**While we can read of the effect of his Baptism in the life of Jesus, the effectiveness of our own baptism has been largely lost on most of us. Since most of us Catholics were baptized shortly after birth, we think of it as a ritual that perhaps has been memorialized in pictures, but never think of it as the turning point in our own lives.**

**The fact is that exactly the same thing happened to us on the day of our Baptism. We became sons and daughters of God. The chrism with which we were anointed infused God's own Spirit into our very being. My favorite part of the Baptismal ritual is when I anoint the head of the person being baptized which makes them, not only a son or daughter of God, but also, with Christ, a prince or princess in the Kingdom of God. That moment in our lives totally and completely changed us. It made us unlike others among us who were never baptized. For them, their lives are their own. They pretty much can do whatever they want. Not so for us, our lives are no longer our own, since God has claimed us for himself, and made us members of his family.**

**Think about it, Church. You now belong to God. You may not be everything that God wants you to be yet, but you still belong to him.**

**The question for us today is what can we do to make the grace of our baptism effective in our lives? First and foremost, I would suggest, walk the walk of Jesus' life in this worship cycle that the Church provides for us. Week by week, preferably even, day by day, reflect on the Scriptures provided by the Church and seek to place yourself in the particular scene of the life of Christ that day or that week.**

**I'll bet that few of you know that if you follow the Scriptures provided in the liturgy every day of the week, by the end of the three year cycle, you will have read the entire Bible. Whoever said that our Catholic Church is not a Bible-based Church doesn't really know anything about us.**

**If you faithfully share in the events of Christ's life from his Nativity in December to the Feast of Pentecost in June, then the months from July to November, are the months to apply the lessons you've learned in sharing the life of Christ that has become part of you.**

**It has often been said that converts make the best Catholics. I've come to see that's really true. And I believe it is because converts to Catholicism experience their baptismal grace as adults. It's more real to them.**

**I can think of any number of people who have become Catholics later in life who are on fire with their faith and truly put Christ first and foremost in their lives.**

**One person who comes to mind, that will remain nameless so as not to embarrass him, went through our RCIA program a few years back. He was motivated to look into joining the Church because he found a compassionate, caring response to a terrible tragedy. He knew that something was lacking in his life and he wanted to fill that void. Following his baptism, he discovered a hunger for the Scriptures, developed a deep devotion to our Blessed Mother, started coming to daily Mass occasionally, and now rarely misses. He is a Proclaimer of the Word, a Eucharistic Minister, a member of Pastoral Council, and is now studying to attain a Master's Degree in Theology. That's Baptismal grace that is alive.**

**And there are others who drifted away from the Church through negligence or the cares and anxieties of daily life, who rediscovered their baptismal grace after a life-changing event in their lives that left them searching—searching for peace, for comfort, for hope in the face of loss, sickness, despair, or disappointment. These too have opened their lives to daily prayer and service in the community that is the Church.**

**My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, I tell you all this so that you might be aware of the awesome power that you have by virtue of your Baptism in Christ Jesus. God has called each and every one of us here. He has called us by name. We are his beloved sons and precious daughters whom he has anointed with his very own Spirit, as surely as he did Jesus of Nazareth in the Jordan River two thousand years ago.**

**Jesus Himself assures us of this when he tells us in John 14: “Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these...”**

**That is the meaning and the power and the strength of our Baptism, to “do the works that Jesus did, and greater than them”. Be assured that when you claim your Baptismal grace, if you listen carefully to the Voice that speaks to your heart, you will hear, “You are my beloved Son, you are my precious Daughter, with you I am well pleased”.**