



Baptism of the Lord: 10th and 11th January 2021

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit”.

When I was a Parish Priest this Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord brought the Christmas season to a close: we had celebrated the Birth of Jesus at Bethlehem; His Epiphany/Manifestation to the world in the persons of the Magi who had come from afar seeking the Shepherd King; and today at His Baptism in the Jordan a further Epiphany/Manifestation to the world as the Son of God...

All three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) record this event as it was clearly so important in the eyes of the early Church. And, when you look back at early frescoes and paintings recalling key events in the life of Christ, Mary and the Apostles, you will see the Baptism of Our Lord features prominently. In this week’s Burning Bush 10-minute meditation and prayer online, I have posted a picture of a fresco where the Baptism of Our Lord is depicted in one of the early Churches in Cyprus, where St Paul’s journeys took him.

The descent of the Holy Spirit on Jesus shows that something new is happening through the Baptism and Ministry of Jesus: the voice that comes from Heaven, in St Mark’s Gospel, proclaims “You are my Son, the Beloved, my favour rests on you.”

This is the moment when the Mission of Jesus began; in St Marks Gospel the Baptism is followed by Jesus’ temptation in the desert and the beginning of His Ministry in Galilee after John was arrested.

In an analogous way our Baptism inaugurates our mission as Christians. And, today is one of the days in the course of the year when the Sprinkling of Holy Water is encouraged at the beginning of Mass to remind us of the moment of our Baptism, the day when we were adopted as Children of God, and a day to recall as we grow in Faith and witness to Our Lord as Saviour of the World.

This year of course is a special one to be considering our Faith and Witness in the light of the experience of the Pandemic. Pope Francis has expressed his reflections in a new book “Let us Dream” which is the outcome of discussions with Austin Ivereigh, the English Catholic Commentator and Author. Pope Francis says: “This is a moment to dream big...to rethink our priorities – what we value, what we want, what we seek – and commit to act in our daily life on what we have dreamed of.”

The foundation of our reflection, our dream for daily life, is the person of Jesus Himself, who He is for us, what He teaches us. Fortunately, soon, in this month in fact, we have the first Annual Sunday of the Word of God which directs us to the Scriptures and their interpretation in the life and teaching of the Church. We have an opportunity to give

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some time to reflection and prayer, to growth in knowledge of the Mission of Jesus and our part in it, especially in these times. Pope Francis is quoted in the Observer Newspaper for 29th November as speaking of the doorstep applause for the nurses and doctors risking their lives and the key workers who have kept essential services going as a collective “lightbulb” moment, saying: “They are the saints next door, who have awoken something important in our hearts...the antibodies to the virus of indifference. They remind us that our lives are a gift and we grow by giving of ourselves”. This Feast reminds us of the gratitude that should mark our lives as Christians: gratitude for our Baptism, gratitude for our having been bought to the life of Faith, to knowledge and Love of our Lord.

As I celebrated the Epiphany, the journey of the Magi who risked life and limb in their quest to find the Infant King of the Jews, whom they met in the stable at Bethlehem, I was reminded that we too must continue to seek Him, that the COVID experience could be a pivotal moment for a fresh encounter with Our Lord. As I recall the Pope walking along the streets of Rome in the rain to the Church where the Cross is honored which saved Rome in an earlier Pandemic, I am sure that it is on the Cross we will find the Jesus who reassures us that the way of love and self-giving is the way to a new life, the high point of our Baptismal way, which we celebrate today.

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