

“Console My People, console them, says your God. “Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and tell her that her time of service has ended, that her sin is atoned for, that she has received from the hand of the Lord double punishment for all her crimes.”

The repetition of the word “Console” echoes a tone of mercy. God was about to show mercy to His people. To speak tenderly meant to speak to the heart. This was a delicate expression of Divine love that God was manifesting towards His people. During the previous centuries the people had turned away from God. As such, they had been punished. They paid double for their sins. While some may view such a punishment as being very severe, it should not be perceived as Divine anger but as a time of purification. God sanctified a people unto Himself.

This tender expression of Divine love is seen above all in today’s Feast of our Lord’s Baptism

You might ask why Jesus underwent baptism at the hands of John, especially as John’s Baptism was only a symbol representing interior conversion from sin, and Christ was without sin. But Jesus willingly represented us sinners at His Baptism. At His Baptism He took upon the sins of humanity and buried them in the waters of the Jordan so that we might rise to a new life in Christ. As Saint Paul would say in His letter to the Corinthians “For our sake God made the sinless one into sin, so that in Him we might become the goodness of God”.

Jesus' example of being baptised was to tell us that the Sacrament of Baptism is the Way to new life, to being born again of water and the spirit. As Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit." (Jn3:5)

Now a new era was on the horizon, a time of joy and peace, the glorious moment when God's people would be redeemed.

My brothers and Sisters in Christ, Jesus is the Way, and the Truth and the Life (Jn14:6) As John the Baptist was commissioned to prepare the Way of the Lord, we, as baptised and confirmed Christians, have also been called by God to preach the Good News to all those with whom we come into contact.

We might ask ourselves if we have allowed our baptismal grace to become dormant, to lie unused?

Father Dominic's priest friend tells the story of a 27-year-old, an electrical contractor, who came from a staunch Catholic family. He had got on to hard drugs and had become a pusher. He continued thus for five years and reached rock bottom. He came across a Baptist minister and in dialogue with one another they expressed two shared beliefs:

Firstly, they had **Faith in Jesus as their Lord**; and secondly they grew in the conviction regarding **the power of the Holy Spirit to change one's life**. This young man eventually committed himself to the Lord. Father Dominic's friend spoke of the results of this commitment:

He experienced a deep peace and soon threw off his addiction. He eventually returned to a full sacramental, eucharistic life in the Catholic Church. His religion became real and an exciting dynamic force in his life. **THE SCRIPTURES BECAME ALIVE FOR HIM.**

This is a true story but it is not an isolated case.

Today we celebrate Jesus's own Baptism which heralded His public ministry. So too, the Holy Spirit can prompt us into a **LIVELY ACTIVE FAITH.**

Let us find our joy in the Lord as we hear the voice of the Father confirming us as His beloved children on whom His favour rests:

“It was for no reason except His own compassion that He saved us by means of the cleansing water of rebirth and by renewing us with the Holy Spirit which He has so generously poured out over us through Jesus Christ our Saviour.” (Titus 3:5)