

**Homily for the Feast of Baptism of the Lord Year C, 09-01-2022 by Fr. Lubem Robert Waya, osj.**

**First Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11**

**Psalm: Psalm 104**

**Second Reading: Titus 2:11-14, 3:4-7**

**Gospel: Luke 3:15-16, 21-22**

### **IS YOUR BAPTISM BEARING FRUITS?**

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord officially ends Christmastide and ushers us into the ordinary Time of the church's calendar. It is the only Sunday that belongs to two seasons. And on this day some may wonder why we should be having a reading from the second part of Isaiah which is post-exilic and expressive of the fact that God had forgiven Israel her sins after her supposed 'punishment' in Babylon. John the Baptist also further took up this same message in preparing the people for the coming of Christ by emphasizing the importance of making straight His paths and filling up every valley and laying low the mountains in our lives. A very important aspect of all these preparations is to follow in the footsteps of Christ too who even though was God, accepted baptism to identify with us whom He had come to redeem. But in addition to that too, His baptism was an occasion to reveal His glory as the heritage of all who choose to follow Him, just as we see in the gospel reading. For in the gospel, after His baptism there was a manifestation of the Trinitarian presence as the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the shape of a dove and the voice of the Father from heaven proclaimed, 'You are my Son, the Beloved, my favour rests on you.' This same thing happens at our baptism.

As our penny Catechism teaches us, it is when we accept to be baptized that we officially become Christians, children of God and members of God's Church. Just as we see it happen to Christ, same thing happens at our own baptism - the Trinity is invoked and by that the Trinity is present as the greatest witness to our baptism. It is for this that the Church teaches us that baptism leaves an indelible mark on our souls. That is why it is mere foolishness for us after years to go and lay claim that we wish to be de-baptised, that is, to have our names removed from the baptism registers in order to be freed from our spiritual obligations. Even if the registers are destroyed, we remain baptized and that gives us a permanent Christian and a Catholic identity and status that can never be erased by any human power or force, save by God alone. So once Catholic, we are Catholic for life. At best we become bad Catholics when we choose to do otherwise. However, a true Catholic is the one who embraces wholeheartedly his or her vocation that comes with baptism. And what is our vocation? In the episode of Christ's baptism, we discover our own vocation.

The first hint we get is from the declaration of John the Baptist when the people mistook him for the Messiah. He said the one coming after him is more powerful than he is, and He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. Fire in biblical times was associated with God and with His action in the world and in the lives of His people as seen when God spoke to Moses in the burning bush in Exodus 3:2. So, we too receive God's Holy Spirit and fire when we are baptized. And with our baptism we become God's children, members of God's kingdom because baptism confers on us the right of adoption and immortality without which we cannot claim to be God's children and cannot see God face to face when we die. That is why Christ said, of all born of women, there is none greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than him. Because with baptism we receive God's Holy Spirit which cannot die, and when properly put into use, His Spirit burns with fire in us with which we can enlighten the world. Are you doing this?

At Christ's baptism the Father elected Him as His own Son, the Beloved on whom His favour rests. With baptism we too become God's chosen children and the favour of the Lord upon us is to make us His instruments to drive away darkness in the world. Without this, our baptism is not bearing fruits. Are you bearing fruits? If you are not, then it means you are instead causing darkness in the world by your deeds. Then you are failing in your baptismal vocation. Today St. Paul instructs us to give up all our worldly ambitions and be self-restrained, live good and religious lives while waiting for the appearing of God's glory and eternal life. This is possible because the Spirit we receive at baptism is not a spirit of timidity but that which empowers us to call God 'Abba father' and in His name be able to do all kinds of good works beyond any human ability, so that our souls can tell of the greatness of God. Let us not suffocate God's Spirit in us. May God's Spirit we have received at baptism make us active and constant in good works. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.