

Go Forth...

A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

DEEP FAITH PROMOTES MISSION



SUNDAY READINGS:

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Psalm 29:1-4, 9-10

Acts 10:34-38

Matthew 3:13-17

BAPTIZED FOR GOD'S MISSION

Today's feast, the Baptism of Jesus, is accorded much importance in the Gospels. Questions about the necessity of baptism for Jesus may arise, but the fundamental interpretation of this event is that it was the formal commissioning by the Father of his beloved Son Jesus for his public ministry. Jesus is baptized for mission.

This feast also signals the end of the "Christmas season" and the beginning of "ordinary time," when we reflect on the mystery of Christ's Incarnation and its relationship to our own daily life and mission. "Ordinary Time" has now arrived; we settle into regular, daily life—yes, into the ordinary.

Transforming Daily Life. There is a profound connection between the major feasts of the Christmas season and ordinary, daily life. Because of Christ's coming, no time is ordinary. Indeed, for reflective Christians, no time is simply ordinary in the sense of lacking profound importance; every day is a day of salvation, a day of living into Christ's life.

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We realize that our lives—life itself—are filled with routine, repetitive, monotonous, ordinary activities. Herein lies our vocation and mission, our spirituality and sanctification, the meaning of our baptism. In short, we are called to be “saints of the ordinary.” We, as baptized Christians, are called to walk the unspectacular path to sanctity—imitating Jesus and his mission.

Discovering God’s Presence. Thérèse of Lisieux, the saint of the “little way,” developed a spirituality of ordinariness in which one offers each moment very simply to God. Her famous title, the “Little Flower,” derives from her self-image as only one among millions of ordinary, little flowers on the hillside, each giving all in joy and praise to God. The Holy Family itself lived thirty years, mostly in Nazareth, in simplicity, hiddenness, and obscurity.

Closer to home, we can recall our own mothers and fathers; they are truly “saints of the ordinary.” Parents prepare meals, do laundry, care for children, say their prayers over and over again; they labor daily as clerks, security guards, farmers, office workers (often even in times of sickness); their care of the family is a constant concern. We are all served by people doing ordinary jobs (drivers, gardeners, postal workers, teachers). We need to have open eyes and sensitive hearts to see the epiphany of the divine in the daily, the ordinary! In all things, small or great, we live our baptismal consecration for mission.

Daily Dedication. Many Christians follow that beautiful tradition of praying the morning offering when they awake each day: “O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I offer you all my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day..., in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the world....” In a word, all the ordinary activities of the day (prayers, works, joys, and sufferings) are offered and intended to become avenues of experiencing God’s presence in the commonplace, routine events of our daily life. Truly, our baptismal mission is lived in the ordinary events of daily life!

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NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading - Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7: The Gospels recount the feast of the Lord's baptism that we celebrate today. The words spoken by the voice from heaven echo the words from the prophet Isaiah in today's first reading. Jesus completes the task of the dedicated servant described here by the prophet Isaiah, the chosen one with whom God is well pleased.

Responsorial Psalm - Psalm 29:1-4, 9-10: This psalm selection portrays the voice of the Lord echoing over the vast waters. It is a mighty and majestic voice, coming from the heavens, promising that the Lord will bless his people with peace. All the faithful will praise God and say "Glory"!

Second Reading - Acts 10:34-38: Today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles portrays Peter preaching to a non-Jewish audience; Peter proclaims that God has extended his salvation to them as well as to the Jews. The reading stresses God's presence in Jesus' teachings and good works, a presence clearly manifested in the Baptism of Jesus.

Gospel -

: Our Gospel today from Matthew which recounts the Lord's baptism brings out Jesus' solidarity with us in our human condition. Jesus is baptized for the forgiveness of the sins of others (he was sinless). God the Father affirms Jesus' humility, declaring, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who has recently published Walking with Pope Francis: The Official Documents in Everyday Language (Orbis Books) as well as Exploring Vatican II Treasures: Actors, Events, Insights and A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis (Faith Alive Books).

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