

THE FIRST WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

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Jan.12 **WHERE IS CHRIST LEADING YOU?**
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15 **LIVING AS A CHILD OF OBEDIENCE**
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A reflection FR
- Fri.** **Memorial of St. Anthony, Abbot**
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WHERE IS CHRIST LEADING YOU?

A reflection from a sermon by St. Gregory Nazianzen

Today Christ experiences baptismal enlightenment. Let's go and experience it with Him! Those who are enlightened see the way that really leads to God, into the Promised Land that is the Kingdom of Heaven. That way is the perfect fulfillment of God's holy will. Christ is baptized by entering the river on whose other bank is the Promised Land and he enters it by giving himself totally to the Heavenly Father's will. Let's go with Him down into the waters that wash away every other love than that of God. If we do this we may come up with Christ into the Kingdom!

As John was baptizing Jesus presented himself. He came to show the way to sanctification and to hallow all who walk in that way, even the very person who was to baptize him. Certainly, he was to leave behind the Old Adam, who did his own will and not the Heavenly Father's. He was preparing the way for us by hallowing the waters. He who is both flesh and spirit will baptize with the water of this world and with the Holy Spirit to save both.

John demurred: "*I am one who should be baptized by you*", and not the other way round. That's what a lantern says to the sun and a voice says to the Word and a friend says to the bridegroom. John is the greatest born of woman but the Son is the first born of all. John leaped in his mother's womb, sensing the presence of the unborn Child of Mary. The forerunner adored the one to come after him. We might say what John said, but about our own unworthiness. John was to undergo the baptism of martyrdom, however, and may we be worthy of such grace.

Jesus passes through the water into the promise and he bears the entire world with him. Adam had gotten himself barred from paradise and his posterity with him. Jesus opens the gates of paradise and not only for himself but for us who believe. A voice came from Heaven to bear witness to this and the Spirit assumed a bodily form in honor of that hallowed body in whom that same Spirit dwells. The Spirit appears as a dove to remind us that a more marvelous peace has now come to the world than an ordinary dove announced after the Great Flood.

Let us pay homage to Christ and to his baptism. This is the day to keep a Feast and celebrate. This is the day to dedicate ourselves to being wholly purified and to keeping ourselves pure. God delights in nothing so much as conversion with turning to his will. For our benefit every saving word is spoken and all the mysteries revealed. We are to be lights in the world and to receive power to give life to others. We first have to receive enlightenment ourselves. Then we have a clearer and fuller understanding of divine truth than ever before. It comes to us from the one Godhead who dwells in Jesus Christ. He is our Lord! Let us give him glory and love him for ever and ever.

CONTEMPLATE THE WONDERS GOD WILL WORK THROUGH YOU

A reflection from a homily by St. Gregory the Wonderworker

Who am I? *“I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord!”* How could I remain silent when you have come to me? Surely, I needed to be baptized by you but how could I imagine you would raise me up to do wonders for you?

John, before his birth, was given the grace of working two wonders. He took away the barrenness of his mother and healed the dumbness which afflicted his father. Aren't we all called by God like John to work wonders through his grace? Aren't we called to lead others to Christ and to prepare them to turn to God with all their heart?

Are you tempted to think this impossible? Is anything impossible for God. Did Mary's virginity impair her ability to bear Christ for the world? Did God find it impossible to preserve her virginity and make her a mother as well? Things which are by nature contrary and mutually exclusive are made compatible by God? Is it any harder for God to work the wonders I have listed using you as his instrument? I am merely human and possess only a share in the grace of God while Jesus is made both God and man. He is the tenderest of all lovers of our human race and of each of us. What can he not do through us?

Yes, we too can say: *“I am the one who needs to be baptized!”* But Jesus has led us into the waters and raised us up to do his work with Him. You, my Lord, are the splendor of the Heavenly Father's glory and his perfect image. You, O Lord, are the true light that enlightens everyone who comes into the world. You took flesh and suffered no change in your godhead by doing so. Is that possible? Then what can be impossible for you?

Between the earth and its creator, between the clay and the potter, the difference is infinite. I know this! You, Lord, are the Sun of Justice and your radiance outshines the poor glimmer of the candle I am. I owe my light to your grace. I confess my own condition as servant and I proclaim your greatness. I admit your perfect authority and recognize my own unworthiness. I am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of your sandals. How could I dare to do what you have done and always do? Do you send me to do your work, as though my hand could stretch out the heavens like a tent?

Is it for me to enlighten those who can be enlightened only by you working within them? Lord, don't let me be struck dumb by my own unworthiness and my sense of my own powerlessness. Let me do all you call me to do and let me trust wholly in your almighty grace in all that I do for you and through you. To you I turn, my Lord.

BELIEVING EVERY WORD FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD

A reflection from a sermon by St. Gregory of Antioch

“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!” This Son didn’t leave the Father’s side when he came to dwell in Mary’s womb. Becoming human didn’t separated the Son from the Father and dwelling in a womb didn’t limit the Son to that small place. Whole and undivided in Heaven, God suffered no violation in taking a home in the Virgin’s womb. There aren’t two persons—the Son and the son of Mary, one lying in a cave and the other adored by the Magi, one baptized and the other needing no baptism. No, in Jesus, we adore the Only Son and the one who is the object of your adoration is the object also of your bodily sight even while he is the One and Invisible God and eternally one with the Heavenly Father. The Son belongs to eternity and also to time; he is one in the Godhead and one with us humans, in all things but sin alone.

We believe all this. We believe as well that Christ is the mediator between each of us and God and makes us all fellow-servants. In his own person he restores sinners to unity with God and with one another. He is Son of God and Lamb of God, priest and victim, offerer and offering, the sacrifice and the one who receives the sacrifice. All of this belongs to the Heavenly Father’s testimony to his only begotten Son at the time of his baptism in the Jordan. When he was transfigured on the mountain in the presence of chosen disciples the Voice of God testified to his being God’s beloved son and added, ***“Listen to him!”***.

When the Son says, ***“I am in the Father and the Father is in me”*** we listen and believe. When he say, ***“He who has seen me has seen the Father”*** we also believe. When he says, ***“The Father who sent me is greater than I”*** we believe. When he says, ***“This is my Body which is broken for you for the remission of sin”***, we believe and see that what he took from us is his own. When he says, ***“This is my Blood”*** we realize that it is truly the very blood of the Son, the one who is seeking to save us.

Now we have been called by God to peace and not conflict. We must be steadfast in our response to our calling. When he says, ***“As the Father had sent me so I send you”***, we need to believe and trust. We have the greatest reverence for the holy altar where we share in the sacred mysteries. We don’t want to be guests at this table and at the same time stumbling-blocks to one another. We need to believe that we are called as Jesus was called. We don’t want the Heavenly Father to say of us, ***“I have begotten children and reared them; I have fed my own but they have rejected me.”*** We must do as God commands us.

May God who is savior of all and author of peace, grant tranquility to the Church, and to all of us. May God watch over his holy flock and protect all those who speak of him to others and who seek to lead them to follow him in baptism and then in ministry to their brothers and sisters. May God join us together into one flock belonging to one sheepfold. Let us believe every word that comes from the mouth of God!

LIVING AS A CHILD OF OBEDIENCE

A reflection adapted from a homily by Sr. Phyllis Hunhoff OSB

From St. Gregory the Great's writings about the life of St. Benedict we learn that the noble family of Rome gave boys to his monastery to be educated and learn to live as monks. That is how Maur and Placid came to Benedict. They regarded him as a father and as one who taught them God's word and will and the virtue of obedience. Four of the major miracles attributed to Benedict involved one of the two boys. The stories show how they trusted and relied upon him when things got difficult and how they believed that, as the Holy Rule says, Benedict was seen as another Christ for the community and its members.

When Benedict drove out a demon who was preventing a monk from praying peacefully Maur first spent two full days praying for the monk. When Benedict recovered the metal part of a bushwacker that a monk had lost in the nearby lake, it was Maur who brought the problem to Benedict's attention. When Benedict prayed that God would create a spring on a hillside where a small monastery was located, Placid prayed with him all night long for this miracle. When Maur ran on water to save Placid from drowning he was so taken up with obeying Benedict that he paid no attention to the fact that he wasn't running on dry land. Both he and Placid attributed what happened to Benedict's prayer.

The families who literally gave Maur and Placid to the monastery, did this because they believed the boys would learn God's word there. The boys weren't needed by their families to produce a coming generation and might cause their father's inheritance to be divided in a way that could injure the family. They weren't "needed" in a worldly sense and so were "given to God". Clearly, Benedict's monasteries had a very good reputation and their monks were seen as living an exemplary Christian life. What better gift to give partly-unwanted children.

The reputation was confirmed by the kind of persons Maur and Placid became—abbots themselves and finally saints. They learned to love and rejoice in a life given to God. They became joyful "sons of obedience", not just to Benedict but to God. A monastery today which had a reputation for forming holy and saintly members with this character would be as attractive now as it was in Benedict's time. This reputation brought it about that the monks became educators, not in the academic sense but in the way a Christian family or community ideally wants to form its members. Those who came to Benedict really became holy and attractive persons who knew how to love one another, and all, in Christ. This is what they passed on to the monks of the monasteries they themselves came to govern. We don't know how people became aware of the quality of the Christian lives led by Benedict's monks, and so decided to give children to God by entrusting them to Benedict's way of monastic life, as we see it in his Rule for Monks. Those who live for God surrender their future as well as themselves to God and allow him to draw others to learn from them and follow their examples. That is what we celebrate as we remember Sts. Maur and Placid, precisely as disciples of St. Benedict.

RECOGNIZING THE SPIRIT WORKING IN US

A reflection taken from a homily by St. Gregory Palamas

When the time had come for the revelation and manifest presentation of God's great plan of salvation God sent John the Baptist. He was the Precursor of Christ and he came from the desert to serve as the Voice of one crying out for all to make ready the way of the Lord, the way by which he would save all Peoples. John baptized all who came to him. He exhorted them to ready their hearts to believe in the One who was to come and, by leading them to give themselves wholly to God, to save all from their sin. Sin is a turning away from God to something else and John called all to accept God and the way of life God had revealed through Moses and the prophets.

The one who was to come would baptize them anew, not simply in water but in the fire of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, John was to recognize this Savior by the coming upon him of the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit is greater than water, so the coming one would be greater than John.

This coming one would be God's chosen Messiah, and would be the Lord and Creator of all things, master of both human and angelic beings. All humankind would be his harvest-field. John himself was not the only one to proclaim this. He pointed to Isaiah as the Lord's herald and described himself as a simple servant sent to announce his Master's coming. His task was to be God's instruments in preparing hearts for Christ's coming.

Then Christ himself came to be baptized. It is fitting for us to conform to God's will in this matter. We are simply giving ourselves to God without reserve. This is the way to salvation and it is what he came to proclaim to all the world. He himself had to be the first to walk this way of salvation, even to his Cross. He himself made it secure as a way for all to walk. That is how baptism cleanses the deep-rooted defilement *within* us that stems from our earthly and fallen birth and our sinful manner of life.

Christ had no need to be cleansed for he had never walked in any way but that of giving himself to the Heavenly *Father*. Yet he had to show us how to walk this way. Therefore he was baptized by John. As he came up from the water the heavens opened above him and the Father's voice was heard: *This is my beloved Son in who I am well pleased!*" And the Spirit of God descended upon him like a dove.

Thus was revealed to all who looked on or who heard of this happening, the significance of the person to whom Heaven and Heaven's God had testified. Having believed, it was their task to walk in the same way. We are now called to be voices crying out to all the Way of the Lord. Are you doing that? Even if you seem to do very little, the simple effort to be a Voice for Christ's coming testifies to the working of the Spirit in you. Rejoice and be glad. God's gift is filling and transforming you.

ST ANTHONY'S CHARGE TO HIS COMPANIONS

From The Life of Anthony by St. Athanasius

When Anthony grew very old he withdrew to the desert, and because of his great age two companions went with him to assist him. When he felt the time of his departure was near he addressed this exhortation to them.

"I am going the way of my fathers, as Scripture says. I see myself called by the Lord. And you should be on your guard and work not to bring to nothing the asceticism you have practiced for so long. Make it your endeavor to keep up your enthusiasm as though you were only now beginning. You know the demons and their designs. You know how fierce these demons are and yet how powerless. Do not be afraid of them.

"Let Christ be your life's breath. Place your confidence in Christ. Live as if dying daily, taking heed for yourselves and remembering the counsel you have heard from me. Let there be no communion whatever between you and the schismatics, and none at all with the heretical Arians. You know how I myself have kept away from them. They attack Christ by their heresy.

"Show your eagerness to give your allegiance, first to the Lord and then to his saints. Then, after your death, they will receive you into everlasting dwellings as familiar friends of God. Give your thoughts to these things; make them your purpose; if you have any care for me and think of me as a father, don't allow anyone to take my body in Egypt, lest they should turn it into relics and keep it in their houses. This was a reason for going to the mountain and coming here.

"You know how I have always put those who practice such deeds to shame. You know I have charged them to stop this practice. You yourself are to carry out the rites of my funeral and are to bury my body in the earth. Let what I have said to you be respected by telling no one of the place where I am buried.

"At the resurrection of the dead I shall receive back my body from the Savior and it will then be incorruptible. You may distribute my few garments to bishop Athanasius and bishop Serapion. Keep my hair shirt for yourselves. God bless you. Anthony is going and is with you no more." More important, God is always with you.

MARY AND GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

A reflection taken from Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

At the center of God's plan of salvation we find Mary. This fact is the key to our understanding of woman's dignity, of human dignity and of that of the world and its history. This means that not only is life sacred from the first, a sacredness calling for respect, love and protection, but that from the beginning each person is truly the object of God's loving plan.

God's plan puts love into our hearts, God's love. We are all invited to listen to the voice of love from the beginning of our existence. We learn to do this by venerating the beginning of the life of the Virgin Mother of God, a life without sin. We don't pray the "Hail Mary" simply out of devotion but to evoke the mysteries which conquer our fears and illumine for us the dignity of every woman and human person. This prayer proclaims a hope-filled event.

Scripture describes the dark and negative existence into which God comes and intervenes by bringing light and salvation. Adam was afraid. We have been afraid from the beginning. This comes from within. We fear God because we are uneasy about ourselves. We feel a dissatisfaction with the life we have received and want to hide ourselves, even from ourselves.

St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians responds to this fear. "*Before the world was made, God chose us, chose us in Christ, to be holy and spotless and to live through love in his presence*". The word 'us' refers first to the heirs of the covenant, chosen by God ages before. The Church takes this to refer to the Daughter of Zion who is Mary. She is the first of believers. She is the first who hoped fully in God's promise of Christ. Mary was predestined "*to be an adopted daughter, to be holy and spotless in God's loving presence*".

The Mother of God is our light. She shines on our world and makes us feel proud to be a human person. We share in her life and mission. Mary, who was a creature of such interior cleanliness as to challenge our own moral dissatisfactions, helps us contemplate her sincerity and humility in God's presence. We can always rejoice because we see Mary before us. It is part of our call to share all this with others so that they too can be proud and grateful to be human and themselves.