

# THE FIRST WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

## THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

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Sun. The Baptism of Jesus

Jan. 9 **LET JESUS' OBEDIENCE BE YOURS**

A reflection from a sermon by St. Hippolytus

Mon. Monday of the 1<sup>st</sup> Week in Ordinary Time

10 **LIVING OUT JESUS' CALL TO ONENESS**

A reflection from a homily by St. Gregory of Antioch

Tues. Memorial of the Dead

11 **ACCEPTING THE GIFT THAT IS COMMUNITY**

From Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini

Wed. Memorial of St. Aelred of Rievaulx

12 **WALKING IN FAITH AND HOPE**

A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

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13 **ENLIGHTENING THE HEART BY FAITH**

A reflection taken from a treatise by St. Pope Leo the Great

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A reflection developed from a homily by St. Aelred of Rievaulx

*Sunday*

## **LET JESUS' OBEDIENCE BE YOURS**

### **A reflection from a sermon by St. Hippolytus**

When Jesus came to John and asked to be baptized John hesitated. Wasn't Jesus the One whose sandal strap John was unworthy to untie? Listen to Jesus: This is what God wishes and we must do it. Jesus offers himself as the perfect example of one who always obeys the Heavenly Father's word and will; he shows us that we are to turn away from the destructive example of our First Parents and not to seek to decide for ourselves what is good and bad. Rely on the leadings of your God. John himself was the first to do as the Lord commanded. I hear your command, Lord; in obedience, I baptize you who obey love's call from God.

Can you grasp what great blessings, and how many blessings, we would have lost if Jesus had not followed perfectly the Heavenly Father's word? Scripture says: "*When Jesus had come up out of the water after baptism, immediately the heavens were opened and the Spirit of God descended in the form of a dove and rested upon him; a voice from heaven said: This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased*". Having descended into sin by our own will, had we tried to ascend to God we would have been acting on our own will. Only in doing only the will of the Heavenly Father, and leading John and all of us to do the same, could Jesus raise us up to heavenly reality and make us again children of God.

We are no longer slaves to what we think is our own will but are caught up with the Lord into heavenly reality. Now God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. That is why we say the doors of the heavenly bridal chamber are flung wide open. We become one with God in the unity that is Jesus the Christ. What was it that Jesus did when he descended into the waters that are this world except give himself wholly into the hands of the Father? This is the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, when Jesus rose from the waters the Holy Spirit was seen to be upon him and to abide in him. The voice that spoke says words that are intended for us, precisely as one with Christ. In doing the whole will of the Heavenly Father we are each and all God's beloved children.

That is why Noah's ark is a symbol of baptism; it realizes God's will to save all who will obey and so love with all the heart and mind and soul. The Spirit came to Noah to show him what to do and when to leave the ark. Jesus knew hunger though he feeds millions; he had nowhere to lay his head though his hand upholds the universe; he suffered while healing, he received a blow on the cheek while giving freedom to the entire world, and from his pierced side sprang the life-giving water of obedience. All was done in obedient love.

Listen to me carefully. I call you to return to the life-giving fountain. I call you to contemplate its healing waters at their source. The Son has come into the world to baptize us with the water that is the Spirit and so give us new birth. What does this water show us? It shows us the love with which we are loved and calls us to love others as we ourselves are loved. Did you ever ask, how can we come to all this? Follow Christ in love. Love is the fullest obedience and the fullest obedience is lived love. Come, as we say symbolically, to this water and this Spirit. What God calls us to do, God gives us the Spirit's grace so we can do it. Believe and obey this call.

Monday

## **LIVING OUT JESUS' CALL TO ONENESS**

### **A reflection from a homily by St. Gregory of Antioch**

*“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased”*. This, indeed, is the one who didn't leave the Heavenly Father when he took up his dwelling in Mary's womb. This One was never separated from the Heavenly Father or from us; whole and undivided, the Son is in heaven and yet is at home in the Virgin's womb. There aren't two—the Only Son of God and the son of Mary. Just so, the same One lay in the manger and was adored by the Magi. There was only one who was baptized, even though having no need to be baptized. This is the Heavenly Father's Son, the only Son. He isn't simply the object of thought but an object of bodily sight; he is one and the same invisible God and yet a human beheld by humans. He belongs both to eternity and to time.

This is part of what we mean when we say this One is the mediator between God and his fellow servants. In this One, unity with God is restored to sinners. This One is Son of God, Lamb of God, priest and victim, offeror and offering, the sacrifice and the one who receives the sacrifice. We have heard the Heavenly Father's testimony to the Only Begotten Son. This testimony was given at his baptism in the Jordan and at his transfiguration on the mountain when he was seen as more radiant than the sun. On both occasions, the same voice testified to him and called us to obey him.

Because of Our Lord's oneness with God, in Him we are drawn into that oneness. *“I am in the Father and the Father is in me”*. That is what he says. He goes on to say: *“One who has seen me has seen the Father too”*. This tells us more than clearly that we have been called by God to peace and not to conflict. We need to be steadfast in our response to this call. At the holy altar, we take part in heavenly mysteries and are made one with them. We can't at the same time be guests at this one table and stumbling-blocks to one another. We can't be sharers in the Eucharist—and so in Christ's very self—and go out to be inflamed against one another in discord.

Who would want to hear the Lord Christ say, *“I have begotten children and reared them, I have fed them as my own kin but they have rejected me”*. God has called some of us to help preserve the unity of the Lord's one flock. God has called all of us to help bring into one sheepfold all those who stray. God wills that there be one flock and one shepherd. God wills that there be one Savior for all. But this cannot be apart from our obedient response to the one God's love for all of us united as One Body. What keeps us apart?

Perhaps someone thinks, “I am greater than that other person so why don't I receive the greater honor?”. But Christ himself says, *“the Father who sent me is greater than I”*. We see him abasing himself yet we forget that in God all are one and there are no differences such as can divide us against one another. All that matters is being one with the One Father and his One Son. When we believe and live this all reasons for conflict and discord are removed. We can even compete with one another in showing the other greater honor than is shown us. This is the lesson of Christ's love. We must open ourselves to obey that love and imitate it in all we do.

Tuesday

## **ACCEPTING THE GIFT THAT IS COMMUNITY**

### **From Journeying with the Lord by Carlo Cardinal Martini**

Community is a gift. It isn't founded on our collaborative efforts, nor on our sincere desire for friendship. These things are important and must be kept in mind but 'being together,' as it is called in the New Testament, is a gift from God. It is a participation in the 'being together' that we call the Trinity. We find the model of this in Jesus being together with his disciples. God shares this Trinitarian community with the Church and in the Church each how to share in this community experience.

We are not only together with other now-living members of Christ but with those who have left this world and entered that of God's Kingdom of everlasting life. As long as we are joined in Christ, we are together with one another. This means that we are helping and being helped by all who are together in this way. By accepting the Word of God, we become members of an authentic community in Christ, living according to the laws of Trinitarian fellowship; i.e., of mutual love.

Lived Christian fellowship begins in the heart. It is from within that intentions come and from them come acts of love, or its opposite. The failure of love and the dominance of evil intentions are what cause division and all that results. But we know that people bound in fellowship with us in Christ are animated by love, a love like Christ's that fills hearts. Those who are already with God are filled with love for us; it is inseparable from their love for God. Are we mindful of their love? Are we always aware, in some way, that we are loved actively and without hesitation by the many who have gone before us, especially those we knew and were joined with in fellowship already upon this earth?

A description of a community based on charity is given us in St. Paul's letter to the Philippians. We are told this charity lives on God's word as ordinary life depends on breathing. The Word of God, not just the Scriptures but Christ, dwells all around us and within us. A Christian community finds in this its Bread of Life. This bread is an indispensable food for the community.

Listen to St. Ambrose: "*When I read the Divine Scriptures God returns to walk in the earthly paradise. Christ and Divine Scripture are the remedy for every distasteful thing and the only refuge from temptation.*" What is temptation but the pull of something or someone other than God, hinting that it can free us from whatever is bothering or worrying us at present? But that is a lie. We turn to God and to God's Word, and we do this not simply on our own but by the help of others, itself given us in love and as a sign of love.

We remember those who have gone before us, and we remember how they persevered to the end in clinging to God and God's promises, especially by recalling Scripture passages to their mind and praying with them. To think of these friends is to be drawn to God and to God's promises. What more do we need than this gift of grace? In it, we are actively united around God and in love. This is part of God's gift of community.

*Wednesday*

## **WALKING IN FAITH AND HOPE**

**A reflection taken from a sermon by St. Aelred of Rievaulx**

When I contemplate the works of the Lord they delight me and I exclaim “How magnificent are your works, O Lord, you have made all things in wisdom”. But this doesn’t ravish my whole soul because I don’t yet see my Lord. I see only something of God’s power and wisdom and beauty but only a little. When I turn my eyes to the works of his mercy and of God’s grace to the wretched I begin to cry out “What shall I return to the Lord for all His mercies to me”? This is only increased by the appearance of the Savior, which we have been celebrating.

I can distinguish three phases in God’s work with us. The first is that which was created, the second that which was condemned on account of sin, and the third that of glory. The first was found in Paradise and the second will be seen on the day of judgment but the third only in Heaven. Our present condition is signified by the star that appeared to the Magi. A star is seen only in the night and it is now night for us compared to the brightness to come from the Sun of Justice. We often, then, don’t know what we should do, how we should speak, or how to pray. So as long as this night lasts we must walk in faith.

In baptism, the rule of right faith was shown us and we believed in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the Spirit the Lord is revealed and water is changed into wine. Grace is revealed and fear is transformed into love. We walk in love by our way of life, imitating Christ’s poverty and humility. What many poor people lament we rejoice in because we walk in the way of God’s commandments and mutual support. God has taught us to turn from evil and do good. The foundation of all good is to reject unfaithfulness and sincerely cling to God and Christ. Without this faith, it is impossible to please God.

If we have put aside grumbling and become skilled in this way of living we walk in a sure hope. Heaven and earth will pass away but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Already grace has appeared and soon glory will come as well. If we receive God in smallness we shall be given God in all greatness. Let us, then, pray that our fears will continually be changed into the wine of faith and of hope and that we may be confirmed in daily good works until the coming of our Lord and Savior in glory.

*Thursday*

## **ENLIGHTENING THE HEART BY FAITH**

### **A reflection taken from a treatise by St. Pope Leo the Great**

The day on which Christ first showed himself to the gentiles as the Savior of the World teaches us important lessons. We are invited to experience in our hearts the same joy the three wise men felt when the sign of the “new” star led them into the presence of the King of Heaven and earth. They had placed their hope in his coming but what had led them to do this? It was a revelation brought about by those who had taught them to interpret the stars’ movements and changes. It is a mystery how God works to bring people to faith and the power of that mystery has not changed though the event lies in a distant past. The point is that we, today, experience the grace flowing from that mystery.

Perhaps most people are led to Christ by the teachings of the prophets or instruction in God’s Law. That was not so for the Magi, and I think we see like things happening in our day. Listen to Isaiah: “The Lord has bared his holy arm in the sight of all nations, and the whole world has seen the salvation which comes from the Lord, our God.” Today we see many people being led from error to knowledge of the True Light. These people formerly didn’t devote themselves to faith or to Jesus Christ but now they come to Christ and to faith. They come even though they had given themselves wholly to the study of worldly wisdom and its practice.

What does it mean to say our God bared his holy arm? It means God has sent people like us to show his care and mercy and love to people who have never before experienced them. It means God has used our lives to send a shaft of radiance into their lives and has guided it so that it pierces their hearts. In response, they come offering myrrh, incense and gold. It is a three-fold offering made, in fact, by all who come to Christ in faith.

To acknowledge Christ’s universal sovereignty and salvation is to offer gold from the treasury that is an enlightened heart. To believe that God’s only Son has become truly one with human nature is to offer myrrh. To declare that Jesus is in no way inferior to the Heavenly Father in majesty is to worship by offering frankincense. These gifts can’t be offered until they have been received from God. It is our hands—our deeds—that God uses to give them to us, so we can share them with others. Let your hearts overflow in loving deeds, always and everywhere.

Friday

## OUR BAPTISM WITH JESUS

*Reflections on the Gospel with C. Stuhlmüller & D. Bergant*

All four Gospels present the ministry of Jesus by talking about his baptism by John the Baptist. The Acts of the Apostles makes it clear that this was part of the teaching all new Christians received. They were taught that their new faith was the fulfillment of the hopes and faith of Israel. It did not occur to any of our forbears in faith that theirs was a religion different than that of Israel. This is the point Pope Pius XI made in calling us “spiritual Semites”.

Israel had been called to “turn to” God; this is the Hebrew way of thinking of “conversion”. John’s baptism was a public declaration that one was turning to God with one’s whole life. God’s Son, the second person of the Trinity, has been turning to the Father and giving Himself totally to the Father, from whom he has his very being. That is what Jesus acts out on a human level when he goes to be baptized. It is what he calls us to do in our baptism and calls us to do today in our Sunday liturgy.

Isaiah prayed: “*O Lord, why do you let us wander from your ways? ... O that you would rend open the heavens and come down...*” (63: 15ff) As Jesus came up from the waters of his baptism the heavens were rent and the Holy Spirit descended on Him. God the Father declared: This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. In this graphic way, we see the fulfillment of Israel’s hopes, and of our own. Our faith is not simply a matter of correct doctrine but of leading us into the life of Jesus as he shows us how to turn at every moment of life, even its worst, to God in surrender and trust and love—for God and all God’s people.

This sort of lived union with God in Jesus is now what we hope for. We are asked to share what is best in our lives—our call from God and our oneness in love with Jesus—with everyone we can. The emphasis is not on our sins but on the turning to God which is automatically a turning away from sin. The Gospels take great pains to show that in Jesus the mysterious prophecies of the Servant Songs of Isaiah are fulfilled. Notice what the Servant is to do: “He shall bring forth justice to the nations, .. open the eyes of the blind.., bring out prisoners from confinement”. He will do all this with tenderness so as not to harm those who have already been hurt. All this is possible because of the Spirit of the Lord, given to the Servant.

The references to Israel’s traditions trace the progression of God’s plan of salvation for all. It began long ago and now passes through Jesus as God’s most excellent Servant. It continues through the followers of Jesus. The same ministry as Jesus was given is now given to us and through the coming of the same Spirit. We live in a time of much unrest and our world seems always poised on the brink of chaos. But the Bible tells us God rules over chaos. We are asked to trust in God, as Jesus did; that is what it means to turn to God everyday. Water symbolizes chaos in the Bible. But Jesus comes forth from the waters after his baptism to begin his ministry and bring order to those who will turn to God. He didn’t look backward but forward to the task ahead. God says to each of us: You are my servant whom I uphold and in whom I am well pleased.

*Saturday*

## **LIVING AS DISCIPLES OF ST. BENEDICT**

### **A reflection developed from a homily by St. Aelred of Rievaulx**

St. Gregory the Great tells us that St. Benedict was filled with the spirit of all the just. In his Rule sparkles the gold of Augustine, the silver of Jerome, the double-dyed purple of Gregory, and the jewel-like sayings of many other holy fathers. But his most precious memory is that of his disciples and their way of life. St. Paul says, *“The temple of God is holy and you are that temple”*. In us, the Lord will reign forever, and yet presently we are on pilgrimage, tabernacles more than temples. Such a tabernacle is born by many shoulders, yours too. From whom do you learn how to carry it?

Listen to what St. Benedict teaches: *“Let them most patiently bear one another’s infirmities, whether of body or of habit”*. Think of the example of this given by two of his disciples, Maur and Placid. Acting in obedience Placid took upon himself a task he wasn’t fully prepared for and, without intending, it found himself in “over his head”, as we say. He was being carried away without being able to master himself and cried out in his heart for help. God revealed this to his spiritual father, who immediately sent a more mature disciple to help him. This one so forgot himself in love for his spiritual father and for his fellow disciple that the Lord worked a miracle through him and saved the endangered brother.

This is the kind of thing that will happen as long as the tabernacles we remain in the world. We have to be carried by others and so we have to love both the Lord and one another with all our heart, forgetting ourselves and our ordinary fears and concerns for the sake of the obedience of love.

Each one of us has a unique gift from God, one this gift and another that one. One can make an offering of extra work, another of extra prayer, another of extra fasting or extra Lectio. But Benedict cautions us, *“no one shall say or presume to think of anything as his own”*. This is not just a matter of cowls and robes but far more of our strengths and spiritual gifts. No one, therefore, should boast about any grace given by God. That is what we learn especially from the examples of St. Maur and St. Placid and the persons they became through obedient love.

No one should envy another because of some grace. God can immediately bring to perfection anyone he pleases and bestows on that person any virtue he pleases. In his caring way, however, he causes each to need others. Thus, humility is cultivated and preserved, charity is increased and unity is recognized. Each thus has the benefit of the virtues of others while preserving humility by the consciousness of individual weakness.

The greatest sweetness is that of fraternal love. Don’t let flies get into this ointment and die, then its sweetness is ruined. I am talking about things like cupidity, envy, and suspicion. This sort of fault can lead even to a kind of spiritual homicide. The worst sort of homicide is killing oneself by vice or another by bad example. It is to avoid such disasters that we must continue in spiritual exercises. It is a part of being buried with Jesus so that we may be like him in death to all that is not the Father’s will or love. We must always seek to walk in newness of life. We do this best when, like Placid and Maur, we help one another out of love for our spiritual fathers and for one another.