

## **THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD, Year C**

Is 40:1-5,9-11; Ps 104:1b-4,24-25,27-30; Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7; Lk 3:15-16,21-22

### ***THE BELOVED, WHO IN TURN, LOVED***

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun

Saturday, January 9, 2010, 5:00 p.m., St. Stephen's, Anoka

Sunday, January 10, 2010, 8:00 a.m., St. Stephen's, Anoka

Sunday, January 10, 2010, 9:30 a.m., Anoka County Jail

Today is the last day of the Christmas season,  
the feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

Baptism is a sacrament.

Jesus is Lord.

I have a few simple questions to get us started.

It might be nice to have some audience participation to warm us up on such a cold day.

I'll ask some questions.

Then, if you will, please answer together, in unison.

Q: How many sacraments are there?

A: Seven.

Q: What is the first sacrament?

A: Baptism.

Q: Where was Jesus baptized?

A: The Jordan River (Lk 3:3).

Q: Who baptized Jesus?

A: John the Baptist (Lk 3:2,3).

Q: What did John the Baptist use to baptize Jesus?

A: Water (Lk 3:16a).

It must have been quite a sight.

A crowd had gathered around Jesus and John.

Jesus was standing knee-deep in the water of the Jordan River.

John the Baptist was standing on the riverbank.

John had cupped water in his hand and poured it over Jesus' head.

Jesus was standing there in the water, dripping wet.

Actually, Jesus' baptism was a familiar sight.

In the months, and maybe years before,

large numbers of people had been coming out to John to be baptized (Lk 3:7a, 21a),

so what happened to Jesus was something they had seen happen to others.

Everything was the same, at least to start with.

Then something unexpected happened: there was a voice.

Q: Where did the voice come from?

A: Heaven (Lk 3:22).

Q: Who spoke?

A: God.

Q: What did God say?

A: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Lk 3:22c).

"My beloved Son."

This is quite a remarkable statement.

Except in modern English we usually don't speak like this.

If my mom were to appear with me right now,

and if I were to introduce her to you,

I probably would not say, "This is my beloved mother."

Instead, I would be more likely to say, "This is my mother who I love very much."

Or if I spoke directly to my mother, I would say, "Mom, I love you."

This is what God in heaven was saying to Jesus:

"Son, I love you very much!"

This is a beautiful statement! A powerful statement!

It is fantastic whenever one person tells another, "I love you."

The gospel passage that we just heard proclaimed does not tell us what happened next.

Jesus' baptism is the middle part of Luke, Chapter 3.

After Jesus was baptized, he went someplace,

and Luke tells us where at the beginning of Chapter 4.

So this is a more difficult question.

Q: After Jesus heard the voice of God, and after he got out of the water,  
where did he go?

A: The desert (Lk 4:1).

Q: How long did Jesus spend in the desert?

A: Forty days and forty nights (Lk 4:2a).

Forty days.

Six and a half weeks.

It's a long time to be alone.

Jesus spent much of that time thinking about what he had just heard.

His Father had just told him, "I love you."

Jesus reflected at length upon the meaning of his Father's love for him.

It would be like if my mom was up here with me now.  
Let's say that my mom would turn to me and say,  
"Michael, I love you very much."  
That would be a very powerful statement.  
Hopefully I would say something like, "Thanks, mom, I love you too."

This statement, "I love you," usually triggers a number of things.  
I would reflect a bit on what it means to be loved by my mom.  
It would fill my heart with great joy.  
It would be extremely important for me to keep the love alive,  
and one of the most effective ways to nurture love is communication,  
so my mom and I talk back and forth on the telephone multiple times each week.  
But talk isn't enough.  
It is very important to convert sentiments into action.  
Love shows itself in kind words and kind deeds.  
So when I talk to my mom, I try to include kind words: compliments, encouragement.  
It is very important to do good deeds, so when I go over to the house,  
I offer to assist her on any jobs, small or big, that she might have for me to do.

The same sort of thing happened for Jesus.  
When Jesus was baptized his Father told him,  
"Son, I love you very much" (paraphrase, Lk 3:22b).  
This was a fantastic statement so he spent a long while thinking about it.  
Jesus' heart would have been filled with great joy.  
The way to keep the love alive is through communication,  
and communication with God is called prayer,  
and Jesus prayed for forty days.  
But talk, prayer, obviously would never be enough.  
The fact that Jesus was loved by his Father  
meant that he had to love his Father in return.  
The way that Jesus showed his love for his Father in heaven  
was to love the people on earth.  
After Jesus was baptized, he was a man on a mission!  
Jesus' love fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:  
He brought "glad tidings to the poor" (Is 61:1; Lk 4:18),  
he preached far and wide – out of love;  
He gave recovery of sight to the blind (Is 42:7; Lk 4:18),  
he cured many different diseases – out of love.  
The Father loved Jesus,  
so Jesus, in turn, loved others.  
Love in response to love is fundamental to Baptism.

This has tremendous implications for us.  
I have a couple more questions for you.  
Here's the first question: please respond either "Yes" or "No."

Q: Are you baptized?

A: Yes!

Q: Does God love you?

A: Yes!

When you and I were baptized, God announced in heaven:

“This is my beloved son!”

“This is my beloved daughter!”

If we are baptized, and if we are loved by God, it is simply fantastic!

If God really and truly loves you or me,

it would be very worth our while from time to time

to reflect upon the meaning and power of God’s infinite love for us.

God’s love for us is reason for great joy and peace.

If we want our love for God to be strong,

and if we want the relationship with God to be close,

we will need to do what Jesus did, spend plenty of time in prayer.

We need to pray, in the morning when we get up,

in the evening, before we go to bed,

and at least a few times scattered throughout the day.

But talk, prayer, obviously is never enough.

If we are loved by God in heaven,

we must love and serve God’s people on earth.

Our kind words and kind deeds start with the people who we are closest to:

husband or wife, children or parents, brothers or sisters.

Charity starts at home!

Then our love and service should branch outward:

to co-workers and classmates, neighbors and customers.

God spoke powerful words when Jesus was baptized:

“You are my beloved Son” (Lk 3:22);

“Jesus, I love you very much.”

You and me, we, too, are baptized,

and God loves us.

Love begets love.

Because God has loved us,

we are called to return that love by loving and serving others

all to give glory and honor to God in heaven.