

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, which officially marks the end of the Christmas Season. So after today, you can take down your Christmas decorations. If you already took them down, just don't tell me.

Almost 7 years ago, back in the summer of 2015, when I was a transitional deacon, I was blessed to go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land for the first time in my life. I love to travel in general, and so having the opportunity to visit the holiest place on earth while preparing for the priesthood was an amazing gift!

While I was in the Holy Land, I was blessed to visit the historical site in the Jordan River where most scholars maintain our Lord Jesus was baptized by St. John the Baptist. It was truly an unforgettable experience. First, in order to get to the site of Jesus' Baptism, we had to travel through a military zone and the main road to get to the Jordan River went through an active mine field on either side. In fact, there were warning signs all over attached to the fencing on either side of the road saying, "Warning! Landmines!" Honestly it was so sad to see considering we were about to visit such a sacred, holy place, but at the

same time it was also eye-opening because it's clear to me that the Devil does not want peace in the Holy Land because he knows that's where God saved the human race.

Upon arrival at the historical site of Jesus' Baptism, I was amazed at what I saw. That part of the Jordan River, which formed Israel's border with the neighboring country of Jordan, was extremely small (it almost looked like a creek) and it was extremely dirty. The water was not clear and it was a muddy, murky, brown. There was actually a sign that said the water is not potable, meaning it's not safe for drinking. There were people getting baptized in there and I thought, "as much as I love you Lord, I'm not stepping foot in that water." And as dirty and muddy as the water looked, it was probably worse in Jesus' time in the first century.

And after reflecting on how dirty the water looked, I thought to myself, yes, our Lord Jesus was baptized in this dirty water. He chose to be baptized here and it signifies God's loving desire to descend into the dirty mud and all of the muck and ugliness of our lives, whatever that might be. In observing the dirty water of the Jordan River, it all made

sense to me in that Jesus' Baptism is totally consistent with the Divine motive behind the Incarnation, which is God's desire to truly be one with us in all things, but sin. In becoming man, God descends into our darkness in order to rescue us and save us forever—He descends into the dirty mud of our suffering and He redeems it.

So when we consider the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord, the logical question usually arises: why did Jesus get baptized? After all, He is the Son of God, He is absolutely perfect and sinless and therefore He has no need of baptism. And yet the Son of God freely chose to be baptized by his cousin John. Why?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, in paragraph 536, answers this question stating: "The baptism of Jesus is on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God's suffering Servant. He *allows* himself to be numbered among sinners; he is already "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world".<sup>232</sup> Already he is anticipating the "baptism" of his bloody death.<sup>233</sup> Already he is coming to "fulfil all righteousness", that is, he is *submitting himself entirely to his Father's will: out of love he consents to this baptism of death* for the remission

of our sins.<sup>234</sup> The Father's voice responds to the Son's acceptance, proclaiming his entire delight in his Son.<sup>235</sup> The Spirit whom Jesus possessed in fullness from his conception comes to "rest on him".<sup>236</sup> Jesus will be the source of the Spirit for all mankind. At his baptism "the heavens were opened"<sup>237</sup> - the heavens that Adam's sin had closed - and the waters were sanctified by the descent of Jesus and the Spirit, a prelude to the new creation."

Brothers and sisters, in light of Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan River, we should consider and reflect upon our own baptism. Do we know the date of our own Baptism and do we celebrate our own Baptismal day just as we celebrate our birthday? I was baptized and confirmed as a baby on January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1988 at Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Church in Easton. Being Lebanese, I'm a Maronite Catholic and in the Maronite rite of the Church, babies are baptized and confirmed at the same time. So I got a "twofer"! It was a good deal!

If you don't know the date of your own Baptism, go home and find out because your Baptismal day is *just as important, if not more important* than your own birthday because that was the day you were

reborn in Christ and received adoption as a son of God! At our own Baptism, we became a new creature and partakers of the divine nature—sharers in the Trinitarian life of God and a new Temple of the Holy Spirit where the divine life dwells through sanctifying grace! At Baptism, we became members of Christ and co-heirs with Him, sharing in *His* mission and identity as Priest, Prophet, and King!

The Catechism of the Catholic Church goes on to say in paragraph 1272: “Incorporated into Christ by Baptism, the person baptized is configured to Christ. Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark (*character*) of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark, even if sin prevents Baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation.<sup>83</sup> Given once for all, Baptism *cannot be repeated.*”

Brothers and sisters, we need to start a trend and new custom within the Church of celebrating our own Baptism day just as we celebrate our birthday! Our life in Christ began with our Baptism! Our discipleship began with our baptism! Our baptism gave us the pathway to eternal life.

As disciples of Christ, we need to rediscover the meaning, power, and effects of our own Baptism. So that's why I would encourage you to go home and read the Catechism of the Catholic Church's section on the Sacrament of Baptism. It's not long (only like 14 pages), but it is profound! The Catechism is online for free and you can just Google "Baptism and Catechism of the Catholic Church."

Why am I suggesting all of this? Because we've forgotten who we are as Christians! We've lost our fundamental identity as disciples of Christ! Many Christians have allowed the world to define them, *when it is really God who defines us!* And so we must know who we are! Baptism reveals our *true identity* as beloved children of God—adopted children in the Son who are heirs to the Kingdom of Heaven! *That is who we are before anything else!*

Brothers and sisters, our baptism is a mission and a calling. Once we're baptized, we're called to then *live our baptism* by following Christ in *all things* through our words *and* actions, through *every aspect of our life*, by living the Gospel publicly *and* privately, when it's easy *and* when it's hard. Our Baptism entrusts us with the mission of leading

others to the saving love and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ! Baptism is a call to sainthood and holiness, which is a life defined by a personal relationship with Christ that is manifested through love and virtue.

Our baptismal call can be summed up in the beautiful words of the First Reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah: “I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.”

Brothers and sisters, let’s thank God for the life-changing gift of our Baptism and celebrate it! And let’s celebrate it by striving to *live* our Baptism every day of our life with the necessary help of God’s grace so that we can be happy with Him now and forever in Heaven.