

FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD (C) (2022)

A) THE ELECTION OF A POPE

- there is one particular occasion when the eyes of the world are turned to the Catholic Church
- election of a new pope
- the Pope, whoever he is, becomes a world figure, a spiritual leader and also the ruler of a City State
- the election of the pope is surrounded in secrecy, and much speculation
- the cardinals are locked away in the Sistine Chapel and only emerge when the election is over
- then the new pope appears on the balcony of St Peter's and is presented to the church and to the world
- sometimes, as in the case of Benedict XVI, he is very well-known indeed
- sometimes, as in the case of Pope Francis, the person is an almost complete unknown
- that presenting of the Pope is a kind of Epiphany, a showing forth, a revelation
- that election marks a new beginning in the life of the person who is chosen
- we can only begin to imagine what it must be like as he takes on enormous responsibilities, and burdens which only he can carry
- Pope Francis began his pontificate by acknowledging that he needed help, and he asked us all to help him by our prayers

B) JESUS' BAPTISM: AN EPIPHANY

- the same is true of the baptism of Jesus:
- in his birth in Bethlehem he was shown or revealed to the humble people of his own nation;
- in the visit of the Three Kings, he was shown or revealed to the nations of the whole world:
- today, on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, he is shown forth or revealed as a grown man to his own contemporaries, to the people he was to minister to in his preaching and healing
- the Church regards all these events as epiphanies, when God is shown forth or revealed in Jesus his Son.

C) JESUS' BAPTISM: A NEW BEGINNING

- the baptism of Jesus marked a turning point, a new beginning in his life.
- he moved out of the obscurity of his hidden years into a very visible and public life.
- there could be no turning back, no real privacy any more.
- He would become a man for others.
- he would be a visible sign of God's love for all people, in what he said and in what he did.

- he would reveal that love above all in his death and resurrection
- the baptism he receives from John will point to that complete self-giving, that offering of his life for all
- He is the Lamb of God, who will take upon himself, and take away, the sins of the whole world.
- and he identifies himself with sinful humanity by asking John to baptise him.

D) JESUS' BAPTISM: HE NEEDED HELP

- as a human being, Jesus would need great love and great support in order to face the enormous task he was being given.
- he would find that love and support first of all in his own family: in the love of Mary (and of Joseph while he was still living)
- but he would find it above all in God the Father's love for him
- that love is expressed at the time of his baptism in a wonderful seal of approval and encouragement:
- YOU ARE MY SON, THE BELOVED, MY FAVOUR RESTS ON YOU.
- "I love you dearly and I am very proud of you"
- and, in his life of prayer, Jesus would return to the Father, over and over again throughout his public ministry, to draw on that love and support and to make sure that what he was doing was what the Father wanted of him.
- the Gospel tells us that Jesus also received the support of God the Holy Spirit, who descended upon him in visible form.
- From now onwards, Jesus will be led and inspired by the Spirit in everything that he does.
- Jesus will need this awareness of the Father's loving care and the strength of the Holy Spirit in his trials, his sufferings and his times of agony.
- And because he was secure in that love, he could give himself so unstintingly to all those needy people who came to him.

E) OUR BEGINNINGS

- our life as Christians is a constant series of new beginnings
- they may not be as spectacular as that of Jesus or even of Pope Francis
- but we can make them just as Jesus did:
- confident in the power of the Holy Spirit to guide and support us
- confident too in the Father's unchanging love for each one of us.
- He says to each one of us: you are my beloved daughter, you are my beloved son, my favour rests on you

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