



The Holy See

FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 13 January 2002

1. *"This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased"* (Mt 3,17).

We have just heard in the Gospel the words that rang out from heaven when Jesus was baptized by John in the River Jordan. They were spoken by a voice from on high: the voice of God the Father. They reveal the mystery that we are celebrating today, the Baptism of Christ. The Man on whom the Holy Spirit descended like a dove is the Son of God who took human flesh from the Virgin Mary to redeem it from sin and death.

How great is *the mystery of salvation!* Dear parents and godparents, the children you present are introduced into this mystery today. By receiving in the Church the sacrament of Baptism, they become sons and daughters of God, "sons in the Son". It is the mystery of the "second birth". The faith of the Church gives the receptivity to grace that the infants need to pass from the state of sin to spiritual life

2. Dear parents, I address you with special consideration, since you have given these creatures life, collaborating with the work of God, the author of all life, and, particularly, each human life. You have given them birth and today you present them at the baptismal font so *that they may receive a second birth from water and the Holy Spirit*. Christ's grace will transform their life from mortal to immortal, freeing it from original sin. Give thanks to the Lord for the gift of their birth and for their spiritual rebirth today.

But what power enables these innocent and unknowing infants to make such a deep spiritual "transition"? It is *faith*, the faith of the Church, professed particularly by you, dear parents and godparents. It is precisely in this faith that your little ones are baptized. Christ does not bring about

the miracle of regenerating man without human collaboration, and the first form of cooperation is faith, so that interiorly attracted by God, the creature freely entrusts himself into his hands.

Today these children receive Baptism on the basis of your faith, which I will shortly call you to profess. How much love, dear friends, and how much responsibility are found in the act you will perform in the name of your children!

3. Some day in the future, when they will be able to understand, with their personal freedom, they will have to make the spiritual journey that with God's grace will lead them to *confirm* in the sacrament of *Confirmation*, the gift they receive today.

But will they be able to be open to faith if they do not receive a supportive witness to it from the adults who surround them? These children need you first of all, dear parents; then they also need you, dear godparents, in order to learn to know the true God who is merciful love. It is up to you to introduce them to this knowledge, first and foremost, through the witness of your behaviour in the relationships you have with them and with others, relationships marked by attention, acceptance and forgiveness. They will understand that God is fidelity if they can first recognize his reflection, even if it is limited and faint, in your loving presence.

Great is the responsibility of parents to cooperate in the spiritual growth of their children! The blessed couple, Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi, were well aware of this. I recently had the joy of raising them to the honour of the altars, and I ask you to get to know them and imitate them. If you find great the mission of being parents "according to the flesh", how much greater is that of *collaborating in the divine fatherhood*, offering your own contribution to shaping in these creatures the image of Jesus, the perfect Man.

4. Do not *ever feel alone* in this demanding mission! May you be comforted by confidence in the guardian angels, for God has entrusted to them his unique message of love for each one of your children. Then the whole Church, for you have the grace of belonging, is committed to helping you: in Heaven the saints are watching over them, especially, those whose names the children bear and who will be their "patrons". On earth there is the ecclesial community, and there it is possible to strengthen your faith and Christian life by the good food of prayer and the sacraments. You will not be able to give to your children what you have not been the first to receive and assimilate!

For all of them, there is our Mother according to the Spirit: the Blessed Virgin Mary. To her I entrust your babies, so that they may become true Christians. I also entrust you, dear parents and godparents, to the Virgin Mary so that you may always know how to pass on to these infants the love they need to *grow* and to *believe*. *Indeed, life and faith go hand in hand!* With God's help may this always be true in the life of every baptized person!

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