



The Holy See

FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sistine Chapel

Sunday, 12 January 2003

1. *"Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near"* (Is 55,6).

These words from the second part of the Book of Isaiah ring out on this Sunday that ends the Christmas season. They are an invitation to go more deeply into the meaning for us of today's Feast, the Baptism of the Lord.

In spirit let us return to the banks of the Jordan where John the Baptist administered a Baptism of repentance, exhorting to conversion. Coming up to the Precursor is Jesus, and with his presence he transformed that gesture of repentance into a solemn manifestation of his divinity. A voice suddenly comes from heaven: *"You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased"* (Mk 1,11) and, in the form of a dove, the Spirit descends upon Jesus.

In that extraordinary event, John saw realized what had been said about the Messiah born in Bethlehem, adored by the shepherds and the Magi. He was the very One foretold by the prophets, the beloved Son of the Father; we must seek him while he can be found and call upon him while he is at hand.

In Baptism every Christian personally meets him; he is inserted into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection and receives a new life, which is the life of God. What a great gift and what a great responsibility!

2. The liturgy today invites us to draw water *"with joy at the fountain of salvation"* (Is 12,3); it

exhorts us to relive our Baptism, giving thanks for the great gifts received.

With these sentiments, I prepare to administer the sacrament of Baptism to the newborn babies, as is now a tradition, in the stupendous Sistine Chapel, where the art of great artists has depicted essential moments of our faith. There are 22 infants, who come mainly from Italy, but also from Poland and Lebanon.

I greet you all, dear brothers and sisters who have wished to take part in this touching celebration. With special affection, I greet you, dear parents and godparents, called to be the first witnesses of the fundamental gift of the faith for these little ones. The Lord entrusts to you, as responsible guardians, the lives that are so precious in his eyes. Devote yourselves lovingly to them so that they may grow "in wisdom, age and grace"; help them to be faithful to their vocation.

In a little while, and in their name, you will renew the promise to fight against evil and to adhere fully to Christ. May your lives always be identified by this generous pledge!

3. You are likewise conscious that the Lord is asking you for a new and deeper collaboration: that is, he is entrusting you with the daily duty of accompanying them on the path of holiness. Make every effort to be holy yourselves in order to guide your children towards that high goal of Christian living. Do not forget that this training in holiness "calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer" (Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, n. 32).

May Mary, the Holy Mother of the Redeemer, who accepted God's plan without reservations, support you, nourishing your hope and desire to serve faithfully Christ and his Church. May our Lady help these little ones especially, so that they can fully realize the plan God has in store for each of them. May she help Christian families throughout the world to be authentic "schools of prayer" in which prayer together becomes more and more the heart and the source of every activity!

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