

## Baptism of the Lord

1. We are about ten months away from the presidential election, but the candidates are running furiously to make good showings in the different state primaries. Can you imagine the energy and stamina they have to find in themselves to keep up this pace? Can you imagine spending every waking minute contemplating the next move politically? What is to be said, where should it be said, and to whom should it be said? I suspect that these candidates many times go without a night's sleep. And yet they have to look their best for the cameras. A candidate who appears tired or worn-out will not win votes. And what is the source of so much energy and stamina? It is their goal, their mission. They want to be president of the United States, and no effort is too great in the pursuit of that prize.

2. Could we not think of today's feast, the baptism of the Lord, as being somewhat similar in theme to this presidential race? Here Jesus appears for the first time as an adult. Here he begins his campaign. Here he appears as a man on a mission, a man with a goal. Here his identity as the son of God becomes public knowledge.

3. Throughout the centuries scholars and believers have attempted to fill in the first years of Jesus' life, what we usually refer to as the hidden years. But their filling in is either pious or educated speculation. We have nothing to go on scripturally. All we know is that as an adult Jesus presents himself for baptism by John and then begins to preach and cure. And once he begins, there is no hesitation, no doubt, no looking back. He knows who he is and what he is about. At the end of his life, when he can see that he will fail, he struggles to accept this failure, and we have no reason to believe that this was an easy thing for him to accept. Indeed, we are told that he sweated blood when contemplating it. But he accept it as part of his father's will for him, the same father who identifies Jesus as his beloved son here at the beginning of his career, at his baptism.

4. All of us take our identities from those who are closest to us, from our parents, from our spouses, from our children. Jesus' identify was found in his relationship with his father. That is what this scene wants to tell us. This was the source of his sense of himself. This was the source of his sense of his life's mission. This is his vocation.

5. There will always be people who sense they have a mission in life. Many, like the Lord, feel that it comes from God their father. But we have to be careful when dealing with such people. In fact, it is only later on that we can know whether or not their mission was truly from God. Think of the religious crack-pots who appear in every generation. But think also of those whose works prove that their vocation, their call, was authentic. Mother Teresa, for example.

6. But a characteristic of our age is a lack of a sense of call or mission or vocation. Many people do not recognize the voice of God speaking to them. They hear many voices, but they don't see the connection between God's voice and the other voices speaking to them. For in the end we have to say that God speaks to us indirectly, that is, in and through the people and circumstances of our lives. We have to learn to recognize his voice in and through these other voices. But many today find it hard to believe that they have a Father who speaks to them and says to them: you are my son, you are my daughter whom I love very much. They believe themselves to be orphans because there is no God, or if there is one, because he could not possibly be concerned about them.

7. Since we live in the same world with these people, their views are part of our lives too, and so we have to struggle to keep alive in our minds and hearts our belief that we are not orphans. There is a God and He loves us. Therefore, like the Lord Jesus, we are filled with his Holy Spirit, and we are sent to preach Good News first to ourselves and then to our world.

8. Let us place ourselves beside Jesus in this Gospel scene. Like him, we allow ourselves to be baptized because we realize that we are in a sinful world and must rise above it. And when we come up out of the water with the Lord Jesus, let us hear the voice addressed to him and to ourselves: You are my beloved child. I love you. That is all we need to know in order to have a goal for our lives. We are the beloved children of God. We must broadcast that Good News in and through the actions of our daily lives. And we will do that if we are firmly grounded in this baptismal conviction: that God loves me and that he has sent his son, and that his son has loved me so much as to give his life for me. That belief will give us the energy and stamina that no presidential candidate will be able to come near.