

The Baptism of the Lord

Year B

Is 42:1-4,6-7

Ps 29: 1-4,9-11

Acts 10:34-38

Mk 1:7-11

George F. Riley, O.S.A.

A man came out of the desert clothed in camel's hair. His costume was meant to resemble the prophet Elias, the herald of the Old Testament. John not only preached mortification, he practiced it. This severe ascetic had but one message to anyone who would listen -- repent!

1. He told all men to change.
2. He told the Sadducees to lay aside their worldliness.
3. He told the Pharisees to lay aside their hypocrisy.
4. He tells us the same thing today, to not only wash away sins by our Baptism, but that we have a commitment to live a Christian life.

John was preaching near the Jordan. As John watched the procession of the Passover, there was still in the air the question of Isaac 2,000 years earlier. "Where is the lamb? Where is the lamb?" And suddenly John stops and looks! In the midst of a sentence he becomes silent for his eyes were riveted on a figure who approached through the crowd. The Baptist pointed to him and cried out, "Look, look, there is the Lamb! Look, there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Here he is of whom I spoke. Here he is whose messenger I am. Here he is whose shoelaces I am not worthy to loose." The Lamb had finally come .

For Jesus, John's baptism was four things:

1. It was the moment of decision. For long he must have been conscious that the time for him to go out had come. He must have waited for a sign. The emergence of John was that sign.
2. It was the moment of identification. Jesus did not have to repent from sin; but here was a movement of the people back to God; and with that Godward movement he was determined to identify himself.
3. It was the moment of approval. No man lightly leaves his home and sets out on an unknown way. He must be very sure he is right. Jesus decided on his course of action, and now he was looking for the seal of approval from God. The voice did not say, "This is my beloved Son," as Matthew has it (Matthew 3:17). It said, "You are my beloved Son," speaking directly to Jesus. At the baptism Jesus submitted his decision to God and that decision was unmistakably approved.
4. It was the moment of equipment. The Holy Spirit descended upon him. There is a certain symbolism here. The dove is the symbol of gentleness. Christ will conquer, but the conquest will be the conquest of love.

As baptized followers of Jesus, we have been bequeathed those same four moments. To

decide in favor of Christ. To take up our cross and identify with our fellow sinners. To place all our values and all our commitments and everything we think is important before the Lord and ask, "Do you approve?" To receive the Holy Spirit, again and again, as we did at our baptism and as we do at this Mass, as we did at our first confession and as we do every time we go to confession, so that we might receive the tools of Christian living: faith, hope, and love.

The Lamb has arrived. He offers himself on this altar. He gives us a share in his sacrifice. The moment has arrived, the hour of decision, the time to act. Will we accept a share in Christ's victory over sin and death, and will we share what we accept with the sick, the suffering, and the lost?