



At his baptism, Christ is named as the beloved Son of God and commissioned to begin his public ministry. May these holy waters remind us of the grace of our own baptism when we, too, were claimed as God's beloved and anointed to serve him . . .

Prayer

God, mighty and vast,
you use simple and ubiquitous water
to reveal saving grace and cleanse us from sin.
As on a calm day a sea becomes like glass,
so too your son *will bless his people with peace*,
he who lives and reigns forever and ever. **Amen.**

Gospel

Mark 1:7-11

This is what John the Baptist proclaimed: "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Brief Silence

For Reflection

Mark describes Jesus's arrival from the humble and unimportant village of Nazareth, in Galilee. Although he is without sin, Jesus puts himself in solidarity with the crowd and with sinful humanity. In the person of Jesus, this is the beginning of a new age, a new relationship of earth and heaven, of the whole of creation and our human condition.

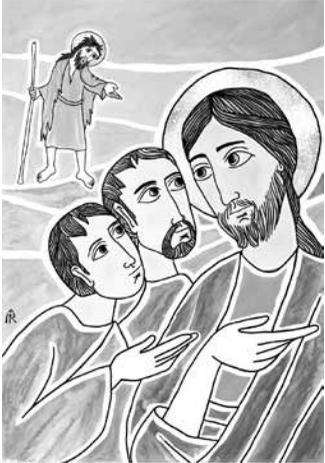
As Joel Marcus comments: "God has ripped the heavens apart irrevocably at Jesus' baptism, never to shut them again. Through this gracious gash in the universe, he has poured forth his Spirit into the earthly realm" (*Mark 1-8*, The Anchor Bible). There is no mountain quaking, no violent cosmic disturbances in this rending; it is a "gracious gash." The symbolism of "like a dove" is perhaps a memory of the spirit/wind of God that brooded birdlike over the face of the primeval waters at the first creation (Gen 1:2). It is also a witness to the gentle action of God that descends upon Jesus to empower him, like the prophets, with gentle service of the poor (e.g., Isa 42:1-5; 61:1) and our humanity that is impoverished by our sinfulness.

◆ Today's feast calls to mind the day of our own baptism. What do you remember or what stories have you heard about the day you were baptized?

Brief Silence

Prayer

God who tore open the heavens, your Spirit once descended like a dove and is still active and alive today. Give us ears to hear your voice, that we too may know we are *beloved*, and that, in your unconditional love, with us you are *well pleased*. **Amen.**



In today’s first reading Samuel hears the voice of God calling in the night and responds, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” For the times we have failed to respond to God’s call in our own lives, let us ask for pardon and mercy . . .

Prayer

Good and gracious God,
you only desire the best for us, giving us what we need in due season.

Grant us the sureness to trust in you, that we might always be willing to pray:

Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.

Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Gospel

John 1:35-42

John was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi”—which translated means Teacher—, “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come, and you will see.” So they went and saw where Jesus was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two who heard John and followed Jesus. He first found his own brother Simon and told him, “We have found the Messiah”—which is translated Christ. Then he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and

said, “You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Cephas”—which is translated Peter.

Brief Silence

For Reflection

The two disciples ask Jesus where he is staying, and he responds by inviting them to “Come, and you will see.” Their question is about a place; their experience is about abiding for the rest of the day in a relationship with a person, about the beginning of a new communion between the people and this Lamb of God. The pattern of discipleship is established: through witness (of the Baptist), others follow and experience Jesus’s truth for themselves. They in turn bring others to Jesus. One of the first two who followed Jesus remains anonymous, perhaps as a Johannine invitation to future readers to see themselves.

This gospel proclaims that all discipleship is an active and involving relationship with Jesus: a following, seeking, staying, finding, and dialoguing with him. We hear how each decision to follow Jesus is a response to a statement about Jesus’s identity as Lamb of God, Rabbi, Messiah, by people whose ears and hearts are open to the Word of God, who hear his invitation through the words of friend or stranger, through events of joy or sorrow, or who discern a moment of religious significance in the everyday.

◆ In today’s gospel Jesus is identified as the Lamb of God, as Teacher, and as Messiah. What do these titles tell you about Jesus’s identity?

Brief Silence

Prayer

Most Holy Counselor, you guide us in paths of truth and righteousness. In trust we respond to your call, *Come, and you will see.* Show us your love, mercy, and truth; grant us your salvation, for you are God, forever and ever. **Amen.**



In today's gospel, Jesus tells Nicodemus, "[T]he light came into the world, but people preferred darkness." For all the times and ways that we have preferred darkness to the light of Christ, let us ask for mercy and pardon . . .

Prayer

God of exiles,
you yourself knew the life of refugee and stranger, fleeing a brutal
and evil ruler.

In times when we feel displaced and forgotten, help us to remember to pray,

Let my tongue be silenced, if I ever forget you,
for you never forget your own. **Amen.**

Gospel

John 3:14-21

Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed. But whoever lives the

truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

Brief Silence

For Reflection

To help Nicodemus understand his mystery and mission, Jesus reminds him of a story from the Hebrew Scriptures. God tells Moses to forge a bronze serpent, fix it and raise it up; if they gaze on it, they will be saved. This seems a great paradox: healing and life from gazing on a creature of death!

In our humanity, we are all bitten by death; yet, Jesus tells Nicodemus, the God who is love wants to give us life that never ends. And so the flesh of the Son of Man will be brutally, senselessly twisted around the wood of the cross, forged by the fire of his passion and death, and raised up for our salvation. In John's gospel, "raising" or "lifting up" always has the double sense of crucifixion and exaltation, death and resurrection, for the two movements are inseparable. The cross that will be raised up and venerated on Good Friday will give way at the Easter Vigil to the raised Easter candle, marked with the cross of fragrant "nails" of incense, from which we catch fire and rekindle our baptismal commitment to the saving and universal love of Jesus Christ.

◆ In today's gospel, Jesus tells Nicodemus, "[T]he light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light." Where do you perceive light encountering darkness in your community at this moment?

Brief Silence

Prayer

God, you gave us your only begotten Son, *so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.* As you were lifted up, so too you raise us up, we who believe, to eternal life. May our lives, in turn, show gratitude. **Amen.**



In baptism we were called by name and entered into the sheepfold of the Good Shepherd. By the sprinkling of this water, may we once again perceive how deeply known and loved we are by God, our creator and redeemer . . .

Prayer

Stone rejected by the builders,
we too at times feel abandoned, cast aside.
Help us remember that you are our cornerstone,
a solid foundation of faith, church, and community.
Give us strong voices to ever praise your name,
here in your holy house, and everywhere we may go. **Amen.**

Gospel

John 10:11-18

Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd. This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again. This command I have received from my Father."

Brief Silence

For Reflection

In her book *Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic*, Maria López writes about watching a poor man, dressed in rags, his hair curly with dust, carefully cleaning the tomb of the slain Archbishop Romero. When she asked him about why he was doing it, he responded, "I'm just a poor man, you know? Sometimes I make some money carrying things for people in the market. And sometimes I spend it on liquor and end up lying hungover on the streets. But I never get discouraged. I had a father! He made me feel like a person. Because he loved people like me and didn't act like we made him sick. He talked to us, he touched us, he asked us questions. He had confidence in us. You could see in his eyes that he cared about me. That's why I clean off his tomb."

In contrast to the Good Shepherd is the hireling who is concerned primarily with his own self-interest. There are still some ecclesial "hired men" with us, but there are also magnificent shepherds who are willing to lay down their life for their sheep.

◆ In the gospel parable Jesus says, "A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." Who are the sheep that you are called to shepherd and how do you give of your life for them?

Brief Silence

Prayer

Good Shepherd, attuned to your voice, we follow. Your crook and staff keep us safe from the wolves that might seek to destroy the herd. Truly, you are goodness and life, you know us better than we know ourselves. We rejoice in your sacrifice and in your guidance. **Amen.**



In baptism we have been grafted on to the true vine of Christ. By the sprinkling of this water, may we be strengthened to remain in him always and to bear much fruit for the glory of God . . .

Prayer

God of all nations,
 you give food to the lowly,
 safety to the insecure, shelter to the homeless.
All the ends of the earth will praise you
 not only *in the assembly of your people*
 but throughout the land:
 you have saved and set us free! **Amen.**

Gospel

John 15:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

Brief Silence

For Reflection

Jesus gives us an image of the great intimacy and interdependence that exist between himself, his Father, and his disciples: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower"—and we are the branches.

To remain healthy and productive the vine must be pruned by our vine grower God. This is not to make of the Vine Grower a ruthless tyrant, because what is done is done out of love for the vine. Sometimes what needs to be pruned in our lives is the parasite runner of individualism that wants to go its own way, or the sucker that feeds on self-interest; both draw life away from the vine. At other times, our vine-dressing God recognizes our potential for greater fruit-bearing, and with this the need for heavy pruning. After such pruning, a vine may bear no fruit for several years, but it remains rooted and waiting, confident in the tending of the Vine Grower, until both are rewarded with a tremendous, bursting yield. When we yield such a harvest of good works, says Jesus, we give glory to the Father and are confirmed in our discipleship.

◆ What "fruits" are evident in yourself, your family, your community that give glory to God?

Brief Silence

Prayer

God the vine grower, we, branches on the vine of your son, Jesus, flourish and grow in faith. Remaining in you and with you, we *will bear much fruit*, and glorify you, who, with the Holy Spirit, are one God, forever and ever. **Amen.**