

Mk 1: 4-11 Children of the Heavenly Father

As Jesus of Nazareth rises up from the waters of the Jordan River the heavens are ripped open. The Holy Spirit descends as a dove upon Jesus, and the heavenly Father proclaims the truth concerning who this Jesus is. "You are My beloved Son, with you I am well pleased." In the washing of this one man, all heaven breaks loose. It is as though the heavens can no longer contain themselves and therefore, heaven itself spills forth upon the earth. Heavenly sights that are extraordinary are seen and heard upon the earth.

The baptism of Jesus begins in a rather plain, ordinary, earthly manner. John the Baptist has been referred to as the last Old Testament prophet, but he appears to be nothing special, especially when we consider him from the food he ate and the clothes he wore. There was nothing heavenly about those things. Similarly, the Jordan River may have an honored past among the Jews, but in reality it is merely a muddy creek compared to the great tributaries of the world. And then there is Jesus. From the world's perspective there is nothing remarkable about Him. He isn't rich. He is not from any of the world's major seats of power. In fact, He's from a little unknown village named Nazareth. One wonders, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" As a bystander along the banks of the Jordan this is all quite ordinary stuff.

But following the Baptism of Jesus something extraordinary occurs. God the Father anoints His beloved Son with the Holy Spirit. St. Mark paints a vivid picture of God for us. Here at the baptism of Jesus God reveals one of the great mysteries concerning Himself. At the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Trinity is revealed. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are manifested together. The heavenly Father, who first spoke all things into being, speaks again for all creation to hear. The Holy Spirit, who initially hovered above the primordial waters of creation, now descends over the baptismal waters of the Jordan River. And Jesus stands at the center of it all. He is the Son of God. And His heavenly Father anoints Him with the Holy Spirit to begin His work of redemption for mankind. At that ordinary place, filled with ordinary earthly things, heavenly realities are made known to mere earthlings: Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God in the flesh.

The baptism of Jesus is awe-inspiring. And at the same time it is quite overwhelming in that it shows us what is lacking in our lives -- proper relationships. In the baptism of Jesus we are reminded of our failed relationships here on earth. God's commandments are clear. Children are to love, honor, and obey their parents. Likewise a wife is love her husband and a husband is to love his wife, even to the point of giving his life for her. Brothers and sisters are to love one another and show respect to each another. These are God-pleasing relationships, which we often fail to have.

Children, even at a very young age, disobey and defy their parents. A wife covets that which her husband cannot or does not provide and winds up having an affair of the flesh or the heart. A husband gives in to temptation and cheats on his wife. Sisters and brothers fight as children over silly and senseless things, and then later as adults harbor animosity and resentment for one another. All of this and so much more damages and

destroys our relationships with one another; relationships that fall far short of the perfect loving relationship we see between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In the baptism of Jesus the intimate relations of Father-Son-Spirit is clearly portrayed. As we reflect upon that perfect loving relationship we are reminded of our own failed relationship with God. Our heavenly Father's commandment to His children is so simple. "You shall have no other gods." Jesus explains it this way, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength."

But what is a god? A god is anything that you put your fear, love, and trust in.

Our relationship with our heavenly Father is broken because we put our fear, love, and trust in just about anything and everything but Him. At worst we reject Him as the one true God and actually worship other gods. And naturally our favorite god is the one we see in the mirror. At best we show our lack of trust in God by not trusting Him to give us a fish instead of a serpent, or an egg instead of a scorpion. (Lk 11:11-12). When God doesn't answer our prayers in the way we think He should, we act like spoiled children, ranting and raving at our heavenly Father; complaining the He doesn't really love us, lamenting that He isn't as generous as to His children as He ought to be.

When it comes to family relationships, whether earthly or heavenly, we are utter failures. None of our relationships are founded upon perfect, selfless love, as we see in the relationship of Jesus with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

But the ultimate purpose of Jesus' baptism is not to show us how broken our relationships are, nor to dangle an unobtainable carrot before our eyes. Instead, the baptism of Jesus reveals to us the ultimate loving relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while at the same time showing us the promise of God's desire to have that some loving relationship with us, with you.

In His Holy Word God refers to the Sacrament of Holy Baptism as the washing of renewal, the washing of rebirth. In Holy Baptism God is at work in you giving you new birth into His holy family by the power of the Holy Spirit. In this heavenly cleansing you are washed clean of your sins, given new life through faith in God's Son, and adopted by God the Father as His own dear child. Old family ties with the devil are cut, while new ones with your gracious, merciful, loving heavenly Father are formed. In Holy Baptism your past failed relationships are cast aside and you are brought into Christ's heavenly family.

Your heavenly Father first spoke and then, with the descent of the Holy Spirit, anointed Jesus, His beloved Son, to begin His work of salvation for you and me and all mankind. Before His baptism, there may have been questions about who Jesus was, but following His baptism there was no doubt. God the Father plainly said that Jesus is the Son of God. And so it is in your own baptism. When the pastor applied the water to you and spoke the divine words commanded by our Lord, "I baptize you into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," the heavens were rent asunder as God identified Himself as your heavenly Father, and you as His beloved son or daughter. In that very moment, you were baptized into the name of the Triune God. He freely and

graciously adopted you into His holy family, and as a result, Jesus, the only-begotten Son of the Father, became your Brother.

Just as Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit in His baptism, so were you. And all doubts concerning who you are in the eyes of God were dashed. For in your Baptism you became a child of God, a son or daughter of the Father, covered in the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness. You have been made dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. And the very One who gave His life on the cross for the sins of the world, including your sins and mine, has welcomed you into His family. The full reconciliation of His shed blood for sinners has been freely given to you, as God's gift to you. All your sins against your spouse, your children, your parents, your brother or sister, and even your sins against God Himself have been forgiven, washed away in that precious heavenly flood of Holy Baptism.

As you look to your Baptism there are certainly earthly components to it: the pastor, the font, the water, and yourself. Of themselves these are all ordinary common things. But God uses them to accomplish His heavenly purpose in your life. Rather than getting caught up in the earthly aspects of this blessed Sacrament look closely and listen carefully for the divine sights and sounds of heaven that were present in the Baptism of Jesus and in your own. For in both His baptism and in yours the glories of heaven spilled forth upon the earth. In both, the one true God has revealed Himself in splendor. In both, the heavenly Father anoints His beloved child with the Holy Spirit and boldly proclaims His pleasure.

I want to leave you with this final thought from God's Word concerning your baptism. In Ezek 36:25-27 our heavenly Father describes the blessings He gives His children in Holy Baptism.

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

And Jesus stands at the center of it all.

How blessed are those whom the Father has made His own dear children through the waters of Holy Baptism. How blessed are you, dear child of God.

Amen