
"CHRISTIAN, RECOGNISE YOUR DIGNITY!"



When I celebrated the sixth anniversary of my episcopal ordination on January 9, 2000, the Church was calling on us to celebrate the feast of the Lord's baptism. May the following reflection be an opportunity for us to remind ourselves of what we are in the eyes of the Lord. Let us remember the marvel which the Holy Spirit operated in each one of us through the waters of Baptism.

A TIME OF JOY

One of the most beautiful liturgical texts the Church offers to our meditation at Christmas time is that of Pope St. Leo the Great for the feast of the Nativity of Jesus: *"Our Saviour was born today: let us rejoice! It is not allowed to be sad when we celebrate the anniversary of life. No one is kept away from this joy since the Lord has come to liberate every human being. The Son of God took on human nature to reconcile it with its Creator. At the birth of the Lord, the angels cry out with joy, 'Glory to God in the highest, and peace to people of good will.' Beloved, we must give thanks to God the Father, through His Son Jesus, in the Holy Spirit; we must live with Christ for us to be a new creation, the new work of his hands.*

"BE AWARE OF YOUR DIGNITY!"

St. Leo then challenges us: "Christian, be aware of your dignity. Since you now share in the divine nature, do not deteriorate by going back to the downfall of your past life. Remember to whom you belong, and of which body you are a member. Remember that you were snatched from the power of darkness to be brought out into the light and the Kingdom of God. Through the sacrament of baptism you became a temple of the Holy Spirit. Do not make such a noble host flee from you through your bad actions, and so to fall back into the slavery of sin, because you have been redeemed by the blood of Christ." [*Liturgy of the Hours*, reading for December 25] It seems to me that this is the great lesson we must draw from the feast of the baptism of Jesus, since it is through baptism that we have become children of God, members of Jesus Christ, beloved children of God: *"Christian, be aware of your dignity!"*

THE GREAT MISSIONS

Throughout the 1987-1990 Edmundston Diocesan Synod, the theme of baptism came up over and over again in discussion and reflections. And during the Great Missions which were held in several parishes of the diocese following the Synod, we were reminded of the wonderful dignity of baptism. "Called by the Father, united to Jesus, animated by the Spirit, sent out into the world." For days and days we reminded one another of the dignity of the baptised. I invite you today to consider and meditate on this same dignity, in the depth of your hearts.

REDISCOVERING BAPTISM

It is urgent to rediscover Baptism. Throughout the centuries it was the same call, the same demand, the same plea. Saint John Eudes declared that it is deplorable, something to make one shed tears of blood, to see so many baptised men and women, people who have become children of God, members of Jesus and living

temples of the Holy Spirit, who do not live according to that dignity. "Yes, it is deplorable, enough to shed tears of blood to see these baptised people who live like animals, like pagans, and even like demons. And responsibility for this state of things is religious ignorance: they have no knowledge of what being baptised is all about." So, by all kinds of ingenious methods and catechism teaching, Saint John Eudes contributed in rechristianising communities, villages, and towns. We are threatened with a similar situation if we are not careful: we must become aware of our dignity of baptised people.

WONDERFUL CATECHESIS

You will recall August 23, 1997, the last day of the World Day of Youth in Paris, the wonderful baptismal evening presided by the Pope himself. Over one million youth were there, and it was there that Pope John Paul II gave one of the most beautiful catecheses ever, on Baptism. After having recalled and commented on the words of Jesus to Nicodemus, "Unless you are born from above, unless you are born of water and the Spirit, you cannot enter the Kingdom of God", Pope John Paul stressed the richness of Christian baptism: *"Dear young people, do you know what the sacrament of baptism does to you? God makes you His children and transforms your existence into a love story with Him. He makes you into the likeness of Christ so you may carry out your personal vocation. He came to enter into covenant with you and he offers you his peace. Live henceforth as children of the light who know that they have been reconciled by the cross of the Saviour. Mystery and hope of the world to come, baptism is the most beautiful of God's gifts inviting us to become disciples of the Lord. We must enter into intimacy with God in His trinitarian life from today onward unto eternity. Baptism is a grace given to the sinner by which he is purified of sin and opened to the new. It is a bath which washes and regenerates. It is an anointing which conforms us to Christ the priest, prophet, and king. It is a light on our path to give it direction; it is a mantle of strength and perfection. Dressed in white on the day of our baptism, just as we shall be on the last day, we are called to daily maintain its brilliance or recover it through forgiveness, prayer, and the Christian life. Baptism is a sign that God has reached us along the path of life, that He enhances our existence, and transforms our history into a sacred history. You have been called and chosen by Christ to live in the freedom of the children of God; you are also confirmed in your baptismal vocation and become the dwelling of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel by your whole lives."* [Text in *La Documentation catholique*, avril 1987]

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« From A Bishop's Journal » (313) (12 January 2000)