



From A Bishop's Journal (654)

Major Elements of Baptism (3)

I am pleased to share with you what Father Lucien Robitaille of Québec considers to be the major elements of baptism.

The Beloved of God

“The main effect of every baptism is that it makes one start living with Christ. Baptism leads to Jesus. The first Christians loved to refer to this conviction by saying that they had been baptised *in the name of Jesus*. In Jesus' name, like a letter written in someone's name. The moment the letter is written it belongs to that person, and to no one else. We are baptised in Jesus' name in order to believe in him and live with him. This is the baptismal confession of Christians: *Jesus Christ is Lord* (Ph. 2:11). To be baptised is to become Christ's disciple. “*Go, and make disciples of all the nations, and baptise them*” (Mt. 28:19). The sign of the cross, the most excellent sign of Christ's love, made on the forehead of the one to be baptised at the beginning of the celebration, clearly indicates the meaning of the event: today begins a long story of Jesus and his disciple, a long love story. To discover the richness of their baptism the early Christians enjoyed considering Jesus' own baptism, the baptism he received from John the Baptist in the waters of the Jordan River. Immediately on coming up out of the water, there took place an unexpected event. *A voice came from the heavens: “You are my beloved Son. On you my favour rests”* (Mk. 1:10-11). You are my beloved Son: these words followed Jesus throughout his life, and they became more and more his only certainty. It is also with these words that the Father would welcome him on Easter Sunday, as he gave the glory of the Son of God to the poor crucified one. At every baptism, it is the same words that the Church asks God to speak to those who are presented for baptism. You are my beloved daughter... You are my beloved son: this is the Gospel of the baptised, the first Good News that comes to them from God. See the great love the Father has shown us, to be called His children, and so we are! (1Jn. 3:1) The first Christians loved to address one another as beloved of God. Saint Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, *to the beloved of God who are in Rome* (Rm. 1:7). Being beloved of God was always for Jesus, in both the luminous and sombre days of his life, a deep certainty. And he calls his disciples to share in this certainty.

A Great River of Love

“*In you my favour rests,*” that is, I have placed all my love in you. Coming up out of the River Jordan, Jesus saw the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. This Spirit, this Breath of love,

always stirred in him like living water and led him to all of his nation's villages, right up to the time of his momentous trip to Jerusalem. At the end of a life of limitless love, Jesus passed on to his disciples his deep and overwhelming love. Since Pentecost, Jesus' disciples have been carried along by the great waters of his love for humankind. Like him, upon coming up out of the waters of baptism, the baptised are given a sign of the gift of the Spirit, an anointing with perfumed oil that is called holy chrism. The words then spoken to the baptised express very well the richness of this act: "God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has freed you from sin, given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and welcomed you into His holy people. You are a member of the Body of Christ. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, He now anoints you with the oil of salvation so you may live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life." Adopted as His beloved by the Father, united to Jesus Christ, and vitalized by the Holy Spirit, the baptised journey together towards the future. They form one body, the Church. Jesus has chosen them and brought them together. It is by his hand that they welcome one another. In one action, this baptismal friendship brings them to the table of friendship, the Eucharist. The one who has been welcomed into the Church is given a place at this table. This place is his own, her own. It will always be there for him/her.

A Life-Long Affair

Baptism is the starting point, it is the sacrament marking the beginning of Christian life. It is a new birth, a new way of being born. Baptism is the sacrament of faith, it gives us the possibility of believing in Jesus Christ and following in his footsteps. The Holy Spirit will gradually help the baptised to know Christ and to welcome his Gospel. Baptism introduces one to a permanent covenant with Jesus Christ. It is a life-long affair: one is baptised one day, one remains baptised forever. This is how Saint Paul spoke of baptismal life: "*All of you who have been baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with him. There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus.*" (Ga. 3:27-28). The baptised have all put on the same garment, which is Jesus Christ himself. Because of him, our differences must lose their power to divide. Baptism is the principle of equality and friendship among all the members of the Christian community. It opens one to the vast horizon of universal fellowship. The baptised are attached to Christ. Now, through his incarnation and death on the cross, Christ entered into a communion of life and destiny with all humankind. His disciples are with him in a new proximity with all the men and women on earth. Every human being is meant to be their neighbour. The grace of baptism is to be united to Christ, the Saviour of the world. It is when celebrated at the Easter Vigil that the sacrament of baptism reveals all its richness. This is the night when Christ broke the bonds of death and came out victorious from the tomb. The Easter candle's flame shines in the darkness. The risen Christ illuminates the darkness of the world. Therefore, the baptised and those who are with them come forward to be taken up with him. If we must share a death such as his own, we are also promised a similar resurrection! With eyes fixed on the newly baptised, the Christian community shares God's dream. The community sees them as associated to Jesus forever. It sees them forever enwrapped by the kindness and the strength of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Then, everything is communion and grace."

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