

FAITH AND REASON

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord :

"Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near" (Is 55,6). These words from the second part of the Book of Isaiah ring out on this Sunday that ends the Christmas season. They are an invitation to go more deeply into the meaning for us of today's Feast, the Baptism of the Lord. In spirit let us return to the banks of the Jordan where John the Baptist administered a Baptism of repentance, exhorting to conversion. Coming up to the Precursor is Jesus, and with his presence he transformed that gesture of repentance into a solemn manifestation of his divinity. A voice suddenly comes from heaven: "You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased" and, in the form of a dove, the Spirit descends upon Jesus. In that extraordinary event, John realized what had been said about the Messiah born in Bethlehem, adored by the shepherds and the Magi. He was the very One foretold by the prophets, the beloved Son of the Father; we must seek him while he can be found and call upon him while he is at hand. In Baptism every Christian personally meets him; he is inserted into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection and receives a new life, which is the life of God. What a great gift and what a great responsibility!

The liturgy today invites us to draw water "with joy at the fountain of salvation" (Is 12,3); it exhorts us to relive our Baptism, giving thanks for the great gifts received. With these sentiments, I prepare to administer the sacrament of Baptism to the newborn babies, as is now a tradition, in the stupendous Sistine Chapel, where the art of great artists has depicted essential moments of our faith. There are 22 infants, who come mainly from Italy, but also from Poland and Lebanon. I greet you all, dear brothers and sisters who have wished to take part in this touching celebration. With special affection, I greet you, dear parents, and godparents, called to be the first witnesses of the fundamental gift of the faith for these little ones. The Lord entrusts to you, as responsible guardians, the lives that are so precious in his eyes. Devote yourselves lovingly to them so that they may grow "in wisdom, age and grace"; help them to be faithful to their vocation. In a little while, and in their name, you will renew the promise to fight against evil and to adhere fully to Christ. May your lives always be identified by this generous pledge!

You are likewise conscious that the Lord is asking you for a new and deeper collaboration: that is, he is entrusting you with the daily duty of accompanying them on the path of holiness. Make every effort to be holy yourselves in order to guide your children towards that high goal of Christian living. Do not forget that this training in holiness "calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer".

May Mary, the Holy Mother of the Redeemer, who accepted God's plan without reservations, support you, nourishing your hope and desire to serve faithfully Christ and his Church. May our Lady help these little ones especially, so that they can fully realize the plan God has in store for each of them. May she help Christian families throughout the world to be authentic "schools of prayer" in which prayer together becomes more and more the heart and the source of every activity.... **Homily of St. John Paul II, Sistine Chapel Sunday, 12 January 2003**

Do Not Spend Your Life Sitting on A Couch: Dear Young Friends, I know that this evening you are keeping a vigil of prayer, you are praying. And I know that others are still on their way, journeying here. How beautiful these two things are: to pray and to journey! There are two things that we have to do in life. We have to keep our hearts open to God, since we receive our strength from him, and we have to keep journeying, because in life one can never stand still. A young person cannot retire at the age of twenty! He or she must keep walking. He or she must always keep moving forward, always going uphill. One of you can say to me: "Yes, Father, but sometimes I am weak, and I fall". That doesn't make any difference! There is an old Alpine song that says: "In the art of climbing, the important thing is not to keep from falling, but never to remain down on the ground". I offer you these two pieces of advice. Never stay down, immediately get up; let someone help you to get up. That's the first thing. The second thing is: Don't spend your life sitting on a couch! Live your life, build your life, do it, keep moving forward! Keep advancing on the journey, get involved and you find extraordinary happiness. I can assure of you of that. May God bless you. I am praying for you; please pray for me.... **The Holy Father to young people in Thailand**

The Patience of David: By patience we are supported when, amid the troubles of this world, our happiness is postponed. It was with such patience that King David endured the attacks of his son Absalom. Although he could have destroyed him David forbade those who were grieved and upset by such treason to take vengeance on his wayward son. He accepted the moment as a time for humility and bowed to the will of God and drank the bitter wine of his son's disloyalty... with the greatest patience... **St Augustine 354-430 A.D.**

God's Ideal Woman: God has two pictures of us: one of what we are, and the other of what we ought to be. He has...the model and he has the reality: the blueprint and the edifice, the score of music and the way we play it. God has to have these two pictures because in each and every one of us there is some disproportion and want of conformity between the original plan and the way we worked it out. The image is often blurred, the print faded. Like unhatched eggs some of us refuse to be warmed by the divine love which is so necessary for the incubation to a higher level. We fall short of what God wants us to be. There is actually only one person in all humanity of whom God has one picture, and in whom there is perfect conformity between what he wanted her to be and what she is and that is Mary, the Mother of the Lord. But Mary is the equal sign, the ideal that God has of her, what she is and in the flesh. The model and the copy are perfect; she is all that was foreseen, planned, and dreamed. The melody of her life is played, just as it was written.... **Bishop Fulton Sheen**

Humility: The Way to Christ: The way to Christ is first through humility, second through humility, third through humility. If humility does not precede and accompany and follow every good work we do, if it is not before us to focus on, if it is not beside us to lean upon, if it is not behind us to fence us in, pride will wrench from our hand any good deed we do at the very moment we do it.....**St Augustine**

A Thought For the Day

Sunday The most essential element in any home is God.
Monday Genuine faith is assuring, insuring, and enduring.
Tuesday Life is fragile – handle with prayer.
Wednesday In nature we hear the speech of God.
Thursday He who desires nothing but God is rich and happy.
Friday Hold out, be steadfast, endure, bear the delay, and you will have carried the cross.
Saturday The heart is happiest when it beats for others.

Refusal to Love: Love can forgive injuries, betrayal, insults, and Divine Love can forgive even to seventy times seven. But there is only one thing in the world which human love cannot forgive, and there is only one thing in eternity which divine love cannot forgive and that is the refusal to love, because that makes forgiveness impossible. Hell is the place where there is no love..... **Bishop Fulton Sheen**

When the Body ceases to be a Limit: Bodily existence can also be lived as opening oneself up, as the developing of freedom of a person who shares himself. We all know that this happens, too; that transcending the limits we touch one another intimately, are close to each other. What people call telepathy is only an extreme case of what to a lesser extent happens among us all: a hidden movement from the heart, being close to each other even at a distance. Resurrection means quite simply that the body ceases to be a limit and that its capacity for communion remains. Jesus could rise from the dead, and did rise from the dead, because he had become as the Son, and as the One who loved on the cross, the One who shares himself wholly with others. To have risen from the dead means to be communicable, it signifies being the One who is open, who gives himself. And on that basis, we can understand that Jesus, in the speech about the Eucharist that John has handed down to us, puts the Resurrection and the Eucharist together, and that the Fathers say that the Eucharist is the medicine of immortality. Receiving Communion means entering into communion with Jesus Christ; it signifies moving into the open through him who alone could overcome the limits and thus, with him and on the basis of his existence, becoming capable Resurrection oneself.....**Pope Benedict XVI**

During the time immediately before and quite some time after my conversion, I thought that leading a religious life meant giving up all earthly things and having one's mind fixed on divine things only. Gradually, however, I learnt that other things are expected of us in this world. I even believe that the deeper someone is drawn to God, the more he has to 'get beyond himself' in this sense, that is, go into the world and carry divine life into it. **St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross**

In His Will is Our Peace
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