**HOMILY ON THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD**

When leprosy broke out among the people of the Hawaiian Islands in the middle of the 19th century, the government authorities responded by establishing a leper colony on the remote island of Molokai. The victims were snatched by force from their families and sent to this island to perish. However, moved by their terrible plight, a young Belgian priest, Damien De Veuster, asked permission from his superiors to minister to them. Straightaway he realized that there was only one effective way to do this, and that was to go and live among them. Having got permission, he went to Molokai. At first, he tried to minister to the lepers while maintaining a certain distance. But he soon realized that he had to live among them in order to gain their trust. As a result, he contracted leprosy himself. The reaction of the lepers was immediate and wholehearted. They embraced him and took him to their hearts. He was now one of them. There was no need, no point anymore, in keeping his distance. The lepers had someone who could talk with authority about leprosy, about brokenness, about rejection and public shame.

Today’s Gospel tells us how, by receiving the baptism of repentance, Jesus became identified with the sinners whom he had come to save. Jesus's baptism is a moment of decision and identification.  By being baptized, Jesus, although he is sinless, identifies himself with the very people that he has come to save. At Calvary, Jesus takes the sin of the world upon himself.  In a similar way, as he immerses himself in the waters of the Jordan, the sinless one takes upon himself the sins of humanity.  Through his baptism, Jesus announces to the world that his public ministry has begun.  In his humanity, he freely chooses to complete this mission and makes a free decision: he will carry out the Father's will to its' ultimate consequence.  Through his baptism, Jesus identifies himself with all of us; i.e., sinful humanity, so that we can come to him filled with total confidence and peace.

The Baptism of the Lord Jesus is the great event celebrated by the Eastern Churches on the feast of Epiphany because it is the occasion of the first public revelation of all the Three Persons in the Holy Trinity, and the official revelation of Jesus as the Son of God to the world by God the Father.  It is also an event described by all four Gospels, and it marks the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. One Eastern theologian wrote, “A new, bright feast has arrived; the day of Light, the day of the most glorious, mysterious [Baptism of the Lord](http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/51046.htm), to Whom we are obligated for our renewal or rebirth, enlightenment, restoration, and adoption by the heavenly Father from Whom humankind was estranged for several thousand years by the defilement of sin”.

Jesus’ baptism by John was a mystical experience that Jesus felt deep within his soul at the crucial turning point of his life. **T**he opening of the Heavens with Holy Spirit, descending as a dove upon Jesus, and the Voice declaring of Him, “This is My beloved Son with Whom I am well pleased,” are God’s revelation to mankind of the Mystery that He is Triune**.**The presence of the Triune God at this baptism, reveals Jesus’ true identity and mission. The Heavens’ opening also indicates that this was a moment of God’s powerful intervention in human history and in the life of His Son. His baptism by John was a very important event**i**n the life of Jesus.

In today's culture, many people, even those who are baptized Christians, have great difficulty with their own identity.  Many people wonder what their purpose is in this life.  People find little or no meaning as they carry out their daily activities. A cloud of laziness hangs over many people as they also strive to find direction for their lives.  The Baptism of the Lord Jesus gives us meaning, purpose and direction.   It is through the sacrament of baptism that we become the Children of God.  Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and it is precisely in Jesus that our human existence finds fulfillment.

The Baptism of the Lord Jesusreminds us of who we are and Whose we are.  By Baptism we become the adoptive sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus, members of his Church, heirs of Heaven and temples of the Holy Spirit. We become incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, and made sharers in the priesthood of Christ [CCC 1279]. Hence, “Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit and the door which gives access to the other Sacraments” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1213).

**Jesus’ baptism reminds us of our mission:**  a) to experience the presence of God within us, to acknowledge our own dignity as God’s children, and to appreciate the Divine Presence in others by honoring them, loving them and serving them in all humility; b) to live as the children of God in thought, word and action so that our Heavenly Father may say to each one of us what He said to Jesus: “You are my beloved son/daughter with whom I am well pleased”; c) to lead a holy and transparent Christian life and not to desecrate  our bodies (the temples of the Holy Spirit and members of Jesus’ Body) by impurity, injustice, intolerance, jealousy or hatred; d) to accept both the good and the bad experiences of life as the gifts of a loving Heavenly Father for our growth in holiness; e) to grow daily in intimacy with God by personal and family prayers, by reading the Word of God, by participating in the Holy Mass, and by frequenting the Sacrament of Reconciliation; f) to be co-creators with God in building up the “Kingdom of God” on earth, a Kingdom of compassion, justice and love, and to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Brothers and Sisters, As many as have been baptized in the name of Christ and the Holy Trinity, have spiritually put on Christ: His righteousness, holiness, meekness, humility, obedience, patience, temperance—in a word, Christ-like perfection, the image of Christ. Glory to the Lord Jesus, who was baptized in the Jordan for our salvation and granted us regeneration, renewal, adoption by God, and eternal life, destroying the former barrier wall of enmity, curse, and God’s righteous rejection of us. Amen

**AMDG**