

The Baptism of the Lord
January 10, 2016

One of the principles of the seminary where men are formed and educated to become priests is that the seminary becomes a place where the students are free to pray and study free from distractions.

This freedom allows the seminarians to ask questions and engage in lively debates. The questions can sometimes lean towards the silly side like: "Can a rogue priest say the words of consecration over a Wonder bread truck and transform everything inside to the Body and Blood of Christ?"

But more often the questions are profound and difficult to answer such as theodicy, which looks at the problem of evil, or how one can possibly explain the perfect harmony that existed between Christ's divine will and his human will.

Another question that was discussed and that is appropriate for today's celebration of Jesus' baptism is, "At what point in his life did Jesus know who he really was?"

Of course we'll never know the answer to that question in this lifetime, but we know from Luke 2:52 that "...Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man." So there was a process where Jesus grew into his understanding of who he was and the saving mission that his Father had sent him to accomplish.

This of course was confirmed in the signs that happened after Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove and a voice from the heavens was heard saying, "You are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased."

From that moment on, Jesus began his ministry with total commitment first going and praying in the desert for forty days. Then he began his public ministry

during which time he preached and did all of the things necessary, including dying on the cross and rising from the dead, to reveal how much God loves us and how much he wants to give us the gift of eternal life.

Because of his total commitment to his mission, everything Jesus did was in perfect fidelity to will of the Father.

And it really is the same with us. Anything of real value that we hope to accomplish in our life cannot be achieved without total commitment. And that's not always easy. Our culture sends us many messages that seem to work against our commitments.

And that's why studying the lives of the saints and seeing their commitments can help us to shore up our own individual commitments to everything that is noble, heroic, and life giving.

And we all know stories of heroic men and women who honor their commitments no matter the cost. We hear of mothers and fathers who stay with their children through horrible sickness and misfortune, giving them their message of sacrificial and steadfast love.

I have already mentioned Jesus commitment to his mission, but we should also remember his mother Mary and St. Joseph were also faithful to their responsibilities.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph were able to do all that God asked them to do because faith and love for God go hand in hand with commitment. Faith and love for God strengthens a commitment to living one's faith. And vice versa. Commitment strengthens faith and love for God.

No successful marriage or vocation to the priesthood or religious life can be achieved without a strong commitment.

That's why Jesus gave us the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, and why marriage and ordination are also sacraments. Each of these sacraments are in a very real way, sacraments of commitment. They are holy moments that enable us to be filled with the same Spirit, which anointed Jesus in his commitment to begin his saving mission.

So today as we celebrate the baptism of our Lord, it is good for us to remember that at the moment of our own baptism, every one of us were given God's promise that his love and mercy would always be there to enable us commit ourselves to living as authentic disciples of Jesus, and that his grace and strength, through prayer and the sacraments, will always be there to help us live out our commitment to his mission.

And so to the extent that we live and act as Christ in every corner of our lives, we, too, will be ready one day to hear the voice of God proclaim: "You are my daughter, you are my son, with you I am well pleased."