

## Baptism of the Lord

I personally am not one to buy lottery tickets, but in my experience, I have never found anyone who does buy lottery tickets who has not thought about what they would do with the money if they won. They have never said, “You know, I really haven’t given it much thought.”

Even those of us who don’t buy lottery tickets have probably fantasized about what it would be like to win the powerball or something like that.

More times than not, the “plan” about what to do with the winnings includes some things for ourselves, but also acts of generosity. We would contribute to our favorite charities. We would see to it that certain people, parents or relatives perhaps, would get something they need or deserve. Maybe we’ve even thought of establishing a foundation.

It’s easy to imagine being generous when we have plenty of resources.

That’s really a good metaphor for thinking about what’s going on in today’s gospel. When Jesus arrives at the Jordan to be baptized by John, John realizes that what he is offering, a baptism of repentance, pales in comparison to what Jesus is offering: adoption into the very family of God.

It’s true, the baptism of repentance is an essential element for making a person available for the greater gift God has in store, and Jesus does not want to do anything that would lead people to think that they can skip over that step, but the encounter between Jesus and John at the Jordan can

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help us keep clear in our minds what is the more important part of the process.

I guess one reason why we get things out of order is because our sins are so much more obvious to us and our suffering because of them is more debilitating.

To know God's forgiveness is such a relief. But we may stop there and lose sight of the greater gift: God invites us to share his life, his divine life.

To live from the reality of the gift that God has given us through Jesus takes the work of faith and we often forget that.

What we have celebrated throughout the Christmas season, though, is the reality that God sends his Son into our world not to convict us, but to give us life.

This has already happened. And it happened while we were still sinners. Apparently, God did not let our sins stop him. The gift of divine life that God gives is already the deepest reality of our identity. It's like we've won the lottery!

That does not mean that we will never sin again, but it does mean that we have the opportunity to move away from thinking that our sins, or even our limitations, are the whole story. They are not even the half of it.

To live from the awareness of what God has already done for us—without our even deserving it—gives us the chance to live from a spirit of generosity because this gift is so great, so rich.

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I know people who do this. You probably do, too, if you stop and think about it. And it does not have anything to do with what they have or don't have when it comes to their possessions. It has more to do with how they encounter the world and the spirit with which they do so.

They act from the conviction that God's gift—the saving grace that comes through his Son and is identified as the Holy Spirit—is always present and can always be brought to bear on whatever is taking place.

Such people are good to be around. They help us forget our failings and the depression that comes from them and reorient us to the big picture: God can reach us wherever it is we find ourselves. He can offer his gifts even there. Forgiveness first and then the very gift of himself.

As we celebrate the baptism of the Lord today, we have the opportunity to put our lives in a proper perspective. The greatest gift has already been given to us and there's plenty of it to go around. We can afford to be generous by sharing the gift we have received—God's life and love—with others.

It will build them up and us up as well, and lead to a ripple effect that carries out into the world in ways we could never imagine.