

Today we are celebrating the baptism of Jesus. This is usually the final Mass of the Christmas Season before we begin “ordinary time” on Monday. During the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter, we explore and celebrate or prepare to celebrate particular events—or mysteries—in the life of Jesus: his nativity, passion, death, and resurrection and what they mean for us. During the season of Ordinary Time we are exploring the mystery of Jesus himself which is revealed to us across the thirty-three or thirty four Sundays of Ordinary Time. That is one reason why it is so important for us to come to Mass EVERY Sunday, not just the ones we feel like attending or the ones which are convenient for us. Another reason we attend Mass is that it is an act of Thanksgiving. What does it say about our gratitude when we grumble about having to say “thank you” to God?

At this point, I am going to more or less directly quote from the Catechism of the Catholic Church (535-537)—if you don’t have one at home, you need to get one. Jesus’ public life begins with what we just heard in the gospel. The baptism of Jesus is, on his part, the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God’s Suffering Servant. He allows himself to be numbered among sinners. He is already the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”—he is anticipating the baptism of his bloody death on the cross. Lambs were used as sacrifices for the atonement of sins—Jesus offered himself as the perfect and innocent sacrificial victim, repaying a debt for our sins that we could not repay on our own. At his Baptism, Jesus is already coming to fulfill all righteousness, that is, he is submitting himself entirely to his Father’s will: out of love he consents to this baptism of death for the remission of our sins. The Father’s voice responds to the Son’s acceptance of his mission, publicly proclaiming his delight in his Son. The Spirit whom Jesus possessed in fullness from the moment of his conception comes “to rest on him.” Jesus will be the source of the Spirit for all mankind. At his baptism the heavens were opened—the heavens that Adam’s sin had closed—and the waters were sanctified by the descent of Jesus and the Spirit, a prelude to the new creation.

Jesus allowed himself to be counted among sinners—meaning us; not those people over there, not those republicans or democrats or Duck fans or Portlanders or Californians or whomever we put on the other side of some ideological line—meaning US. Every one of us here has sinned. Jesus allowed himself to be counted among us; not because he wanted to join us in our sins but because he wanted to lift us up out of our sins, cleanse us, heal us, and save us.

He humbly united his divinity to our humanity but we did not drag him down; he lifted us up.

I am going to close with some words from Saint Paul. Please listen to this, keeping in mind what we have experienced throughout the Christmas season and think about what Jesus did for us and how we respond to him. Those of you who have done a lot of complaining recently, you really need to pay attention to this. This is from chapter 2 of the Letter to the Phillipians: "Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name, that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

How do we respond to the love Christ has shown for us?