

Deacon Kenneth J. Uhlich, Jr., MATS
Most Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Covington, LA
Baptism of the Lord, Year A
January 11 & 12, 2020
Is 42:1-4, 6-7; Acts 10:34-38; Mt 3:13-17
The following text guided today's homily:

“Opening the Gift of Baptism-Praying in the Holy Spirit”

As the Christmas Season closes today, I began to think as most do during this time of year to Christmases past. I distinctly remember that on more than one occasion I received a gift from someone and when I opened it, I thought: “Who can I regift this to?” or “What am I going to do with this? I am never going to use this. Does this person know me at all?”

If you ask my wife, she will tell you that I have also given gifts leaving people asking the same thing about me...What am I going to do with this? I won't ever use it.

I am not alone in this, right? I am sure I am not. We all have gifts that we either never opened or used, no longer use, forgot we have, don't remember receiving, or now find obsolete. This is true even for things we really wanted, right?

In a hidden way see gifts that are given to us in today's Gospel. Jesus's Baptism points to a powerful gift, our Baptism. Our Baptism is like a gift that contains other gifts inside: Freedom from sin, eternal life in Grace, we become new creations in Christ, we become adopted children of God in Christ Jesus, and the Kingdom enters so we can pray by the power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us with His Gifts.¹

¹ Bede Jarrett, O.P., *He Dwells in Your Soul: Encountering the Living God Within You* (Manchester: Sophia Inst. Press, 1988), 81-112.

It is this gift from Baptism, praying in the power of the Holy Spirit that too many of us may seem like a gift that we are not sure we remember getting, or we are not sure we know how to use it, or if we will ever open it. Many tell me “I don’t know how to pray.” Or they get distracted and they get discouraged while in prayer and wonder if they are doing it correctly. While many others I know have never really prayed. But it is the Holy Spirit has descended upon you in Baptism and voice of the Father spoke of you, “This is my beloved.” There is power, real power. The power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ.

The Baptism of the Lord shows the breaking forward of the kingdom, John the Baptist’s ministry ends and Jesus’s starts. The Jordan River was the last place the People of Israel crossed before entering the Promised Land, 40 years after the Exodus that is why John brings them there. John announced a new Exodus as the Kingdom is close at hand by a baptism of repentance. Jesus goes into the waters to purify the waters by His flesh, not to be made holy. Jesus is anointed by the Spirit of God, the word *Christos*, messiah, means “anointed one.”² Leo XIII quotes St. Augustine when he notes that Jesus is God, so He has already been in the Spirit. Moreover, He does not come to realize who He is but rather to reveal who He is, His Kingdom, the Spirit to us, as every action of His was filled with the Holy Spirit.³

Israel prayed for God to tear open the heavens and come down. It is here in this moment that they see the answer to their prayer for centuries. Their prayer is fulfilled for all to see as the waters part as at the Red Sea and the heaven open. A new exodus through His Baptism that is not

² Brant Pitre, “The Mass Readings Explained Cycle A: The Baptism of the Lord.”

³ Leo XIII, *Divinum Illud Munus* No. 4, ““It would be absurd to say that Christ received the Holy Ghost when He was already thirty years of age, for He came to His baptism without sin, and therefore not without the Holy Ghost. At this time, then (that is, at His baptism), He was pleased to prefigure His Church, in which those especially who are baptized receive the Holy Ghost” (De. Trin. 1., xv., c. 26).

just a new exodus but a new creation-by the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit by Baptism. Yes, a cleansing of the world from sin, we are given a new name, new identity, and power.

By His Cross,⁴ He fulfills all righteous and this righteousness before God is given to us in Baptism and again Confession.⁵ By Baptism, we die and rise with Him and become a New Creation, cleansed of sin, and adopted sons. Christ was anointed by the Spirit and you by oils as a Christian...and you have a new name and new calling too. “Behold of all that exists there is nothing that can contain your greatness” St. Gregory of Nyssa. By Baptism, we are a new creation in Christ.

Today we see the mission of the Holy Spirit: the visible dove shows the Spirit leads the Church. However, I would like to focus on the invisible presence in Christ’s Human soul where we learn of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a state of grace by Baptism: Indwelling and Sonship. This is my beloved Son and so it is for us. We need to remain connected to the Holy Spirit in our prayer and in our lives. This is a great gift that we often don’t open.⁶

When John Paul II went to France in 1980, he said, “France you are the eldest daughter of the Church.” You can imagine the millions of Frenchmen stick out their chests with great pride. Even though, France has fallen into atheism over the past two hundred years. Then John Paul lowered the boom. He asked them a powerful question: “What have you done with your baptism?” This is the question for us? What have we done with our Baptism?

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Pitre, “The Baptism of the Lord.”

⁶ Leo XIII, *Divinum Illud Munus* No. 4, “Therefore, by the conspicuous apparition of the Holy Ghost over Christ and by His invisible power in His soul, the twofold mission of the Spirit is foreshadowed, namely, His outward and visible mission in the Church, and His secret indwelling in the souls of the just.”

How can we open our baptism? How can we learn to yield and to pray in the Holy Spirit? When it comes to prayer so often, we find ourselves struggling with distractions or we aren't doing it right. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 27 says, "God never ceases to draw man to himself"⁷ Never! We must remember this.

I know that many feel as though they don't know how to pray or what to say. Now, there are many forms of prayer but as Christians, we pray not by emptying our minds and hearts as the pagans do but by being filled by the actions of Christ in our minds and the Holy Spirit. This is possible for us because as St. Paul tells us in Romans, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."⁸ There is nothing more loveable than love and eternal love and grace has been poured into you.⁹ We must realize that we are loved. Loved not in a sentimental fashion but in a way that grounds the way we pray and live.

We are loved by God as a Father loved his children. Take a moment, think of the moment in your life when you experienced love, security, or peace. Perhaps it was when you were only two or three years old at your mother's knee. This is a moment where God's love was being given to you. It was God's love for you as a Father for His child being mediated through this loved one, perhaps imperfectly through another a mom, dad, grandparent, spouse, child, friend whomever. Make no mistake it was God's being communicated to you through this person.

Now think of what you do when a small child comes to tell you what they want, a little two or three-year-old child. They come to you and ask you for something or to tell you a story and they really can't speak that well. It is broken and confused, right? What do you do? Do you

⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* no. 27 "The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself."

⁸ Romans 5:5

⁹ Leo XIII, *Divinum*, No. 10 "He is also to be loved because He is the substantial, eternal, primal Love, and nothing is more lovable than love."

ignore the child and say, “until you say it right you can forget it!”? Or do you bend down and look them in the eye and help them ask you...you teach them. You teach them how to communicate. This is what the Holy Spirit does in us when we try to pray. When we can't pray for ourselves, He does in us.¹⁰

Even when you are in serious sin, He is trying to draw you back to Himself. If you are struggling with a serious sin over and over again, and you can't seem to break through to your Exodus, ask to unleash the power of the Holy Spirit in your heart. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you and teach you how to live and love, teach you to yield to his power. He accepts our imperfect prayers and loves us to draw us beyond where we are to expands our hearts to love.

Now on a practical point on prayer, I would like to give you two methods to assist you in your prayer. This will assist you in distraction and discouragement and in the changes in your prayer life that will occur over time. In our prayer, we advance the Kingdom. When we pray, we advance the Kingdom in ourselves and in the world as we unleash the power of the Holy Spirit through prayer in the Holy Spirit. So, first, the power of the Holy Spirit reigns in us through Adoration, Contrition (repentance), Thanksgiving and asking Supplication: ACTS.¹¹

1. Adoration-Seeing God as God is perfect way of praying. St. John Vianney found an old farmer sitting in the church silently praying and staring at the Lord in the Tabernacle. He asked the farmer “what are you doing?” He said, “I look at him and he looks at me.”
Adore what a great way to prepare for Mass.

¹⁰ Romans 8: 26-27 “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because^[a] the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

¹¹ Divine Intimacy Radio Podcast, “A Simple Start to Prayer,” 12/4/2018.

2. Contrition-the Holy Spirit will teach us what we need to repent of to become more and more purified to pray more effectively to hear His voice more clearly.
3. Thanksgiving allows my heart to expand for all that the Lord has done for bringing the Kingdom into my heart.
4. Supplication-ask for our daily bread, some of us don't want to bother God with our lives but He commands us to pray and to ask...to adore, to repent, to give thanks, and then to ask for our daily needs.

The Book of Acts is where we learn so much about the power of the Holy Spirit, so I suggest that you remember ACTS in the Holy Spirit. There is a power from the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that is the Spirit of Christ, in Him and Us.¹² When Paul was in Ephesus, he asked some converts, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They answered him, "We have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." (Acts 19: 1, 2) This is sadly so many of us in our lives too. We walk around as though we have not power¹³ within us. But we are called to pray not with our power but with the power of the Kingdom within us.¹⁴ This is how we are to pray with power! Heaven has already come down and has anointed us and given us the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

¹² Colossians 1: 27 "*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*"

¹³ "Dunamis" is a Greek word and means: "act of power" (Young's); "miraculous power, ability" (Strong's)

¹⁴ Acts 1: 8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samar'ia and to the end of the earth." Ephesians 3: 20 "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen."

¹⁵ I John 2: 27-29 "but the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him. And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears, we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who does right is born of him."

We have by the Holy Spirit the Spirit and power of Christ which is “to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.”¹⁶

By ACTS in the Holy Spirit, we must allow ourselves in prayer to learn to yield to the Holy Spirit. “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”¹⁷ teaches us how to pray and live. When you read scripture don’t just read if a word or sentence that strikes you stop and listen meditate. This is how we learn to yield to the Spirit as we grow in prayer and experience new paths of prayer.¹⁸ This way of praying comes from our Baptism and our Confirmation and is nourished at the Eucharist. Call upon the graces of your Baptism and Confirmation, pray well when you feel it and when you don’t. Remember, is the Holy Spirit that is present to set free and on fire.

Throughout this next week consider the following to assist you in really living your Baptism with the power of Christ in and through the Holy Spirit.

1. This week wake up 15 minutes earlier than usual and remember ACTS in the Holy Spirit: Adore, Contrition, Thanksgiving, & Supplication.
2. Begin reading through the Gospel of St. John and when you find a passage that speaks to you to stay there and learn to yield to the Holy Spirit.
3. Turn off the radio this week when you are driving around. Learn to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit calling from within you.

¹⁶ Is 42: 7

¹⁷ Romans 8: 14

¹⁸ Divine Intimacy, “Simple.”

4. Be willing to meet Christ not in the waters but in Confession this week especially if you are in mortal sin?

In mere moments we will have the opportunity to have the presence of the Trinity strengthened as we come up for Holy Communion. Today let the Lord set you on fire with the Holy Spirit: renewing you, filling you, guiding you, strengthening you against sin. By grace and adoption, you are His Beloved.

What will you do with the gift of your baptism and the Holy Spirit? Will you open this gift that if for you, the gift of sonship and glory to be known here and in its fullness in Heaven forever?