



Apostles for Today

Reflections and prayers - December 2011

God the Infinite Love **Meditation 27 (OCC XIII, pp. 138-141)**

The Infinite Love and Mercy of Our Lord Jesus Christ as Shown in His Baptism

Introductory Prayer:

Jesus, Son of the living God, we stand in awe of your infinite Holiness. A Holiness that embraces our sinful humanity, as you descend into John's Baptism of repentance in the Jordan, even though you are without sin. Help us live out the holiness and dignity we received as son and daughter of God when we were baptised into you; help us renew it again and again in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We ask this in your name. Amen.

“What happened to Jesus at his Baptism must happen to you.” This was the expectation of the early Church spoken to people who wished to leave their old lifestyle and become Christians. They were handed the book of the Gospels which, if you took away the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke, all begin with the Baptism of Jesus at the Jordan. So what happened at the Baptism of Jesus?

It was a moment of decision, a *kairos* moment, a call to Jesus from the Father to begin his public mission for the salvation of us all. Jesus submitted to John's Baptism which was a baptism of repentance. This act encapsulated God's work of incarnation/salvation. Jesus the Son of God, though he was without sin, entered into our sinful condition to redeem us from within, truly becoming our firstborn Brother. St Vincent dwelt in depth upon this mystery of the sinless one showing himself a sinner. In awe at the Holiness of Jesus, Vincent directs us to the Sacrament of Penance to restore our baptismal innocence. Instead of Vincent's approach I will stay with Jesus' Baptism and focus on Jesus' Abba experience, which happened as he came up from the water, being empowered by the Spirit for mission, and hearing the Father's voice. Fully holy and fully human, it is Jesus' human experience of being Son of the Father, called to do God's will.

Jesus' identity as Son finds its basis here, in the all-encompassing awareness of being loved by his Father. St Mark accentuates this in his account of the theophany at Jesus' Baptism, where Jesus is revealed as "Beloved Son" on whom God's favour rests (Mk 1:11). The reference is to the 'Servant' spoken of in Isaiah 42:1, "the chosen one (*eklektos*) in whom God is well pleased." Instead of *eklektos*, however, Mark uses "*agapetos uios*" (beloved Son) to underline Jesus' own relationship to his Abba. The Hebrew word for being 'well-pleased' is '*rason*' which also means 'the one who always carries out my will.'" Even in his agony in Gethsemane, Jesus'

relationship to his Father remained intact. His relationship to God, his striking use of Abba in prayer that he taught his disciples (even in the face of imminent crucifixion, Mk 14:36) left an indelible impression on them.

From his Baptism in the Jordan arose the urgent priority to proclaim the kingdom of God. The Holiness of Jesus in himself, and His Holiness in confrontation with sin, injustice and greed, highlight the two-fold meaning of the kingdom of God. **The first meaning of kingdom** is an inner experience in Jesus himself of God reigning as God in him. Jesus in his humanity was so attuned to the will of God that God could act as God in him. God's reign was fully present in Jesus. **The second meaning of kingdom** is the outward manifestation of God's reign, the overwhelming compassionate love of the Father, which compelled Jesus to challenge people to change the world to be the place his loving Father wanted it to be. The kingdom, solely the work of God, was already present in Jesus' ministry of teaching, healing and exorcism in a radically new way, challenging every situation that was contrary to the loving kindness and justice of his Father. Throughout his ministry, the startling praxis and teaching of Jesus that angered his opponents, sprang from his unique intimacy with God. His experienced love of the Father is what Jesus sought to engender in those who followed him and in the most marginalized.

Vincent is right in calling us back to renew our Baptism through Penance, because what happened to Jesus is meant to happen to us. What is that? It is the decision to change our lives from sin, and from structural sin prevalent in our society that we are complicit in; it is our need to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to let God reign as God in us; to work to bring about the kind of world the Father wants; and to reach out to the marginalized in our society and world as Jesus and Vincent did.

Let us Pray: Jesus, give us your horror of sin and injustice, even though you lived in the thick of it. Give us your experience of being beloved son or daughter of the Father to overcome our fear and reluctance to act. Send your Spirit of love to awaken our conscience to all that is good and holy, to all that is wrong that we can remedy. Help us to act not singly but in solidarity with others. Help us to proclaim by our lives your kingdom in our midst. Through Jesus the Christ, our first-born Brother and Son of God. Amen.

Concluding Prayer:

Lord, you call us to live out the fruitfulness of our Baptism, that we in turn may experience being loved by the Father and generously take up the task of bringing about the kind of world the Father wants – a kingdom of love, justice and peace. Amen.