

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today is the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. This marks the end of the Christmas Season. I know, I know, your trees have probably been down for a while now, but the Baptism of the Lord marks the end of these mysteries we celebrate for Christmas. And what is this mystery? That Jesus, the sinless God, goes into the waters of baptism, not for His own sake, but for ours. His humanity so unites to ours that He prepares the waters for you and me. You see, what happened to Jesus in His baptism happens to each of us in our baptism.

When John baptized Jesus, the Holy Spirit visibly descend upon Him. When we are baptized, we recognize that the Holy Spirit rests upon us. True, it is rarely a visible reality, but that's why we have sacraments. Remember the Baltimore Catechism definition of a sacrament: "An outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace." The outward, sensible signs show us that God is working underneath. We see water, Chrism Oil, a lit candle, a white garment; we feel the touches, and hear words. These sensible (meaning we experience them through the senses) signs point to a reality beneath that we cannot sense – that the Holy Spirit has come to live in our souls.

At Jesus' baptism, the voice comes from heaven "You are my Son, my beloved; with you I am well pleased." This points back to three places in the Scriptures. The first is the Abraham story: Isaac as the "Beloved Son"; the second is to Psalm 2 ("You are my son, this day I have begotten you"); and the third is to the suffering servant of Isaiah ("Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased," Isaiah 42:1). In each of these references, we see the identity and destiny of Jesus laid out. He is the beloved Son of the Father, who will be sacrificed (as was Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac... though Abraham's sacrifice was done vicariously through a lamb, in this case, Jesus *is* the Lamb of God). He is Messiah ("anointed" – both king and son of David) as was proclaimed in Psalm 2. He is going to suffer to set the peoples free from sin (as seen in the four servant songs of Isaiah).

These theophanies (manifestations of God) point to Jesus' identity and destiny. They also speak to our identity and destiny. This is important, so make sure you get this: by your baptism, by my baptism, you and I are beloved children of God – and He is pleased with you and me. *Really!* You are God's daughter or son. By baptism, you have been welcomed into God's family. You are an heir to the Kingdom. True, we are adopted children, not biological, but this actually points to a deeper reality.

In St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, we read that we have "received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, 'Abba, Father!'" (Romans 8:15). The ancient Roman world had some gruesome laws. If you were pregnant and did not want the child, you could abort it. If your child was born, but you did not want it (because it was the wrong sex, had a birth defect, or you just didn't feel like taking care of it), you could abandon it and leave it to die. However, Roman law said, if you *adopted* a child, you *had to care for it*. The thought process was that with your biological child, you didn't know what you were getting, but in adoption, you were well aware. So, legally, you could *not* abandon an adopted child, though you could your own biological child. St. Paul, as a Roman citizen, would have known this law, and would have known that the Roman Church to whom he was writing would have known it. He is saying that, since God has adopted us, He *cannot* abandon us; He *must* stick by us! That's something to ponder!

You see, your identity, my identity, is that we are beloved sons and daughters of God. He is pleased with us. He has a great destiny for us: that He has made us to be with Him forever in heaven. We can accept or reject this destiny, but His love for us will not fail, will not turn away.

In those times when you feel worthless, beaten down, like the world is against you (which we hear about in Psalm 2... read it, it's a great psalm, though short), God says, "You are Mine. I've got you!" When we think our bad decisions have tainted who we are (by saying things like, "I am a failure. I am stupid. I can't do anything right. I am a fool."), we can cling to the truth: "I am a beloved child of God. I am pleasing to Him."

This is your identity. Your sin, weakness, and failures do not define you. You are defined by the fact that you are loved by God. That's all that important. That's all you need know.