

The Baptism of the Lord – 01-09-2022

“The people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Christ. John answered them all, saying, ‘I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.’”

John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance to prepare the hearts of the people for the coming of the messiah. Jesus is the messiah of whom John testified that one mightier than he was coming who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

When Jesus was baptized he sanctified the waters of the whole world and prepared them to be worthy channels of his salvation.

Now when a priest, deacon or even a layperson baptizes with water according to the proper formula – In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit – a tremendous grace and power comes upon the recipient and they are made children of God and members of the Catholic Church. Consequently, they are afforded great protection against evil as well.

So I have an interesting story to tell you. I was talking to a priest friend of mine from the Diocese of Nashville just after Christmas.

He’s the exorcist of the diocese and he told me a story about a young woman and her six year old son.

Fr. Dan was initially called to perform an exorcism of place over their home. There was some abnormal activity occurring in their house so Fr. Dan went there to try and alleviate some of the issues.

He was able to take care of the problem but he warned the mother that she needed to get back to church and get her life in order. She promised she would but it didn't happen and then he got another call from her about the same issues.

Again he went and did an exorcism of place, again he fixed the problem and warned her a second time that she needed to get back to church and get her life in order. Again she made the same promise.

And then she called a third time but this time she was concerned about her six year old son. Mind you she hadn't come back to church so Fr. Dan said to her I'm not coming to you this time. You will have to come to me and bring your son with you.

This little boy was behaving badly to say the least. Fr. Dan didn't go into all the details but even as his mother was driving the little boy to see Fr. Dan he managed to escape the car at a stop light and the mother had to chase him down. He didn't want to see Fr. Dan.

They finally got to church and Fr. Dan led the child through a series of renunciation prayers but when it came time to say the name of Jesus he couldn't and exhibited some very bizarre behavior. Let's just say he was doing things that a normal six year old boy would ordinarily not do.

That's when Fr. Dan discovered that the little boy had not yet been baptized. Again, the mother and father had seriously neglected their parental duties and without baptism Fr. Dan said he was virtually powerless.

So he got the mother's permission to baptize her son along with the assurance that she would come back to church and raise him in the faith. She promised and Fr. Dan took her at her word.

He did the full rite of baptism and when he poured the baptismal water over the little boy he became completely calm and afterward he behaved just like a six year old boy should behave.

This is the power of baptism!

In the gospel today we heard, "After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'"

This is what happened at this little boy's baptism and it happened at ours as well. We may not have seen the Holy Spirit descend, or experienced his fire-like cleansing power, or heard the voice of the Father from heaven claiming us as his beloved sons and daughters but it happened nonetheless.

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Are our hearts filled with expectation? They should be because we have been baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire and have been made sons and daughters of the living God.