

Sacred Ground
A Lord's Flock Worship Service Topic
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The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist was the first epiphany. God's voice coming from heaven revealed the identity of Jesus, *"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased"* (Mark 1). It was the inauguration of Jesus' public life. This is the gift of our baptism: there is One who loves us no matter what. Hence, baptism is the sacred ground of our Catholic life: it marks the beginning of a new life when we become a new being in Christ.

The Grace of Baptism: *"a new being"* means

1. **From no one to someone.** We become adopted children of God and He treats us as His own. Many have identity crises today; we associate identity with likes and followers in social media or the brand names we use. We question our value because we rely on opinions of people. Often, we associate identity with our flaws. However, God is reminding us that we are more than our status, achievement, or profession. We are the BELOVED SONS or DAUGHTERS of God, *"You we mine. You are loved."*
2. **From being enslaved by sin to being forgiven and free (from original sin).**
 - Consequences of sin: miserable life; death, and eternal damnation. The Devil (sin) tells us: *"You cannot change; there is no way back because you are beyond forgiveness."*
 - However, God says: *"You can begin again. My mercy is greater than your sin. You are forgiven. Come back to me."* Therefore, we become free to become what God has created us to be: free to love, free to serve, free to be holy. He is healing our present.
3. **From isolation to communion.** We are incorporated into the Church.
 - In Baptism, we are not alone; we become part of something greater than ourselves. We belong to **ONE Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church**. We are connected to Vatican; we all have the same Eucharistic celebration regardless of location/distance. We belong to a family that extends beyond our biological families: a community that prays with us and leads us towards Christ.
4. **Hence, who are you?**
 - You are NOT nobody. You are a beloved son or daughter of God.
 - You are not defined by your sin. You are forgiven and called to live in freedom.
 - You are not alone. You belong to one family of Christ.

- You may be spiritual/religious. But are you humane ("makatao")? The magnificence of the human person means to be true and compassionate people. Children of God are grounded and not doing bad things.

5. What are the obstacles to living the Baptismal grace?

- **A lost identity** means feeling worthless, not loved. When we forget that we are beloved children of God, we begin looking for our worth in the wrong places. **The antidote: Remember that God says: "You are my beloved child. You belong to me."**
- **Lost sense of sin.** We become numb to sin (little white lies become "normal"). We lose our awareness of our need for God. We become proud, judgmental, unforgiving, and merciless towards others. **The antidote: Return to God's mercy.** Every time we repent or seek forgiveness, God will embrace us with mercy and compassion.
- **Lost sense of connection and belonging.** In the digital world, we can easily connect with friends afar. However, despite the world becoming connected technologically, we can feel disconnected relationally. Evil fuels disconnection, division, and fragmentation in relationships; it encourages individualism (I, me, mine) and a "throw away" culture – friends, spouses, and service become disposable. Evil fosters jealousy, superiority/inferiority complexes, and judgmental attitudes. Hence, we become instruments of Satan when we lack empathy, unwilling to forgive, have the desire to divide rather than united. Be mindful of gossip. In group sharing, we are entrusted with personal stories; we have a sacred obligation to keep these confidential. **Antidote: Go home and love your family and community.**

CONCLUSION: Jesus exhorts: *"By this you will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (Jn.13:35). Faith Affirmation: *"I am God's beloved; I can return to His mercy; I belong to one holy family; God is with me. Thus, "All will be well."*

<u>Concern</u>	<u>Antidote</u>
• Isolation	Belonging
• Judgement	Understanding
• Gossip	Charity
• Indifference	Compassion

REFLECTION: As truly baptized, does your life look like the life of someone who belongs to Christ? Do you truly live the identity you received in Baptism?

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