

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year C

Baptism of the Lord

First reading: (Isaiah 42.1-4, 6-7)

My Chosen One in whom my Soul Delights

In the Book of Isaiah occur four songs about a Servant of the Lord. The fourth is familiar from Good Friday's liturgy, for it is about the servant's triumph through rejection and suffering. Today we are given the first of the four songs.

The servant is the Lord's Chosen One, on whom the Lord confers his Spirit, with the mission of bringing true justice to the nations. Jesus refers to himself frequently as servant. He must have had these poems in mind. In his human mind, the opening of the first song must have echoed in his head as he set off after his baptism on his mission to bring the sovereignty of God to a new degree of realism. The coming of the Spirit and the voice from heaven constitute a sign that determines his way.

In so many ways, this prophecy is echoed in his behaviour, his gentleness, his light to the blind, his freeing so many captivities of human distortion, his zeal for God's will, and finally in his supreme act of service and love. Is this our programme too?

Question:

What are the chief obstacles today to the mission of the Church?

Second reading: (Acts 10.34-38)

Jesus Begins in Galilee

In this reading, we are given Peter's address to Cornelius the centurion, the first gentile to be received into the community of the followers of Jesus, a decisive step in the opening of God's blessing on the world. Each of Peter's addresses, however, begins the history of Jesus' mission at the Baptism. In the selection of a successor to Judas, the chief conditions were discipleship, company with Jesus from this first moment of baptism, and witness to the Resurrection.

The example of Jesus' life and activity must be familiar to enable us to see what the implications of living out the sovereignty of God must be, how we too can be the servants of the Lord. That is why familiarity with the four gospels is so important. These four different faces of the prism that make up the gospel of Jesus Christ all have their contribution to make to our intimate knowledge and love of Jesus.

Question:

In what sense is Christ the Lord of the Church?

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Gospel:

(Luke 3.15-16, 21-22)

The Coming of the Spirit

Luke does not tell us who baptized Jesus. In Luke, the story of John the Baptist ends with his promise of one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit - then John is arrested. At the baptism itself all Luke's concentration is on the coming of the Spirit. Indeed, it is hardly an account of the baptism at all, for the baptism is only a time marker for the coming of the Spirit 'when Jesus, after his own baptism, was at prayer'.

Jesus' mission begins with the coming of the Spirit. In the same way, in Luke's second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, the mission of the apostles begins with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. It is as if Luke wants to show the importance of the Spirit from beginning to end of the Christian life. And this is the case: in both writings, the part played by the Spirit directs all the action. The same is still true in the Church today, although often human stubbornness and blindness do their best to retard or impede this leadership and guidance by the Spirit. Most of us are artistes at blocking the Spirit when the Spirit's promptings are inconvenient.

Question:

Is the dove a good symbol of the Spirit?
