Embracing Our Humanity

The life of Jesus of Nazareth, as we know, begins with the "infancy stories" which we read in Matthew and Luke, and even with the Logos' (Word) existence with God in the beginning which we read in John. But these are only "introns" to the main event—the public life and ministry of Jesus. This main event begins with the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. Baptism is the "door" through which Jesus entered and changed human affairs. In fact, the kerygma, or first announcement of the Apostles about Jesus, refers to this singular event. Peter explains to the household of Cornelius: "You know...what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed with the devil, for God was with him" (Second Reading).

Baptism in Judaism in Jesus’ time was done through immersion. The one who baptizes is called Ha-matev ("the emitter"). John is the "Baptist" or the "Emerger.

One enters "into the waters," which recalls the death symbol of the annihilating power of the Flood. One therefore "dies" to sin, which one confesses while being immersed in the water. But the flowing waters of the river also symbolize life. As one emerges from the water, one is purified of the sinful past that burdens and distorts life. One becomes new again and starts a new life.

Was this true of Jesus? He has no sins to confess, as pointed out by John himself: "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?" (Mt 3:14). Jesus, however, replies: "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Righteousness is God's will to save humanity. Thus, Jesus' falling in line with sinners to receive baptism expresses his solidarity with sinful humanity; he loads the burden of mankind's guilt upon his shoulders, and removes it by his Resurrection.

Jesus' solidarity with sinful and suffering humanity fulfills Isaiah' oracle about the Ebed Yahweh, the Suffering Servant of the Lord (First Reading). He possesses God's spirit and power, but he will accomplish his mission of bringing peace to the nations not by shouting and threats, not by punishing the unjust, but by justice, mercy, and compassion. Jesus is gentle and humble of heart. He is close to the suffering, the outcasts, and sinners. When asked by John the Baptist's messengers whether he is truly the Messiah because he acts like one, Jesus replies: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news proclaimed to them. And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me" (Lk 7:22-23). Clearly, Jesus is the personification of the mysterious Servant of the Lord.

Jesus' baptism is his "anointing" by God, empowering him to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom. Matthew writes that the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove. And the heavenly Father declares Jesus as his beloved Son, with whom he is well pleased. Receiving his "credentials," Jesus begins his journey that will end in his death and resurrection.

What about us? Our own baptism opens for us "the door" to a journey from a state of sin into a new life, as we are "immersed" in water and rise from it. St. Paul tells us the effect of this sacrament: "We were buried...with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in the newness of life" (Rom 6:4).

Fr. Gil Alinsangan, SSP

Pastoral Catechism for the
Year of Ecumenism, Interreligious Dialogue, and Indigenous People

Ecumenism: Brief Historical Details

— Fr. James H. Kroeger, MM

It is an historical fact that the twentieth century was the century of the ecumenical movement. This movement began first among Protestants who hoped to better coordinate their missionary work. It grew into a series of various international gatherings that discussed some questions of doctrine as well as missionary practice.

An important milestone came in 1948, when representatives from 147 Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox churches established the World Council of Churches (WCC). In the early days of WCC, the Roman Catholic Church distanced herself from these initiatives. In fact, Catholics were forbidden to take part in any ecumenical gatherings.

The Vatican argued that any participation in such assemblies would give the wrong impression; it would falsely imply that one church is as valid as another; it could also cause confusion in matters of faith. Pope Pius XI's 1928 encyclical Mortalium Animos asserted that the only way to foster Christian unity was to encourage those separated from the Catholic Church (viewed as heretics and schismatics) to repent and come back to the one true church of Christ. Reunion meant return to the Roman Catholic Church. Fortunately, attitudes began to change in the 1950s.
THE INTRODUCTORY RITES

Entrance Antiphon
(Cf. Mt 3:16-17)
(Recited when there is no opening song)

After the Lord was baptized, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit descended upon him like a dove, and the voice of the Father thundered: This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

Greeting
(The sign of the cross is made here.)

P — Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
All — And with your spirit.

Introduction
(These [or similar] words may be used to address the assembly.)

P — Today we celebrate the feast of the Lord’s Baptism. Liturgically, today marks the end of the Christmas season. The baptism of the Lord inaugurates his mission as Messiah. But Jesus reveals himself not as a glorious figure but one who is obedient to the Father and close to the poor and to sinners. Today’s feast reminds us of our own baptism, which entails dying to our own sinful ways to rise up as beloved children of the Father.

Penitential Act
P — Brethren (brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries.
(Pause)

P — You were sent to heal the contrite heart of the Lord; have mercy.
All — Lord, have mercy.

P — You came to call sinners: Christ, have mercy.
All — Christ, have mercy.

P — You are seated at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us: Lord, have mercy.
All — Lord, have mercy.

P — May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.
All — Amen.

The Liturgy of the Word

First Reading (Is 42:1-4, 6-7)

Isaiah describes the vocation, mission, and suffering of God’s servant who will come to save his people.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

THUS SAYS the LORD: Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations, not crying out, not shouting, not making his voice heard in the street. A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench, until he establishes justice on the earth; the coastlands will wait for his teaching.

I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.

— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 29)

R — The Lord will bless his people with peace.

1. Give to the LORD, you sons of God, 
   give to the LORD glory and praise,
   give to the LORD the glory due his name;
   adore the LORD in holy attire. (R)

2. The voice of the LORD is over the waters,
   the LORD over vast waters,
   The voice of the LORD is mighty;
   the voice of the LORD is majestic. (R)

3. The God of glory thunders,
   and in his temple all say, “Glory!”
   The LORD is enthroned above the flood;
   the LORD is enthroned as king forever. (R)

Second Reading (Acts 10:34-38)

Peter explains to the pagan Cornelius and his household that God has brought salvation to Jews and pagans alike through the mission of Jesus.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

PETER proceeded to speak to those gathered in the house of Cornelius, saying:
“In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him. You know the word that he sent to the Israelites as he proclaimed peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all, what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.”

— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Alleluia [cf. Mk 9:7] (Stand)

— Alleluia, alleluia. The heavens were opened and the voice of the Father thundered: This is my beloved Son, listen to him. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel (Mt 3:13-17)

P — A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew
All — Glory to you, O Lord.

JESUS came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. John tried to prevent him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?” Jesus said to him in reply, “Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed him. After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

— The Gospel of the Lord.
All — Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily (Sit)

Profession of Faith (Stand)

All — I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven.
(At the words that follow, up to and including and became man, all bow.)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.
I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayer of the Faithful

P — Jesus came to be baptized in the Jordan so that through the cleansing waters of baptism he might heal our sinful nature. Let us now pray to the Father that we may live up to our dignity as children of God. We pray:
R — Lord, listen to your people.

C — May the People of God have a renewed appreciation of the sacrament of Baptism, which is the foundation of communion among all Christians. We pray: (R)

C — May we be faithful to our baptismal calling to be “other Christs” who continue his mission of doing good to people around us. We pray: (R)

C — May parents and godparents be faithful to their duty in bringing up children in the knowledge of the Faith and in obedience to God’s commandments. We pray: (R)

C — May those who exercise authority learn from the example of Christ who followed God’s will in humility and service. We pray: (R)

C — May the Lord keep in safety those who travel today, give comfort to the sick and the suffering, and welcome to paradise the faithful departed. We pray: (R)

C — Let us pray for the urgent concerns of our community and our personal intentions (pause). We pray: (R)

P — Heavenly Father, grant that we be faithful to Jesus to whom we belong by our baptism in water and the Spirit.
We ask this through the same Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Presentation of the Gifts
(Stand)

P — Pray, brethren...
All — May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

Prayer over the Offerings

P — Accept, O Lord, the offerings we have brought to honor the revealing of your beloved Son, so that the oblation of your faithful may be transformed into the sacrifice of him who willed in his compassion to wash away the sins of the world.
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
All — Amen.
Preface: The Baptism of the Lord

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.
P — Lift up your hearts.
All — We lift them up to the Lord.
P — Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
All — It is right and just.

P — It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God.

For in the waters of the Jordan you revealed with signs and wonders a new Baptism, so that through the voice that came down from heaven we might come to believe in your Word dwelling among us, and by the Spirit’s descending in the likeness of a dove we might know that Christ your Servant has been anointed with the oil of gladness and sent to bring the good news to the poor.

And so, with the Powers of heaven, we worship you constantly on earth, and before your majesty without end we acclaim:
All — Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. (Kneel)

Acclamation (Stand)
All — We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again.

THE COMMUNION RITE

The Lord’s Prayer
All — Our Father...
P — Deliver us, Lord...
All — For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.

Invitation to Peace
Invitation to Communion (Kneel)

P — Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.
All — Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Communion Antiphon (Jn 1:32, 34)

Behold the One of whom John said: I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.

Prayer after Communion (Stand)
P — Let us pray. (Pause)
Nourished with these sacred gifts, we humbly entreat your mercy, O Lord, that, faithfully listening to your Only Begotten Son, we may be your children in name and in truth.

Through Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

Solemn Blessing
P — Bow your heads and pray for God’s blessing. (Pause)

Be gracious to your people, O Lord, and do not withhold consolation on earth from those you call to strive for heaven.

Through Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

Dismissal
P — And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, (+) and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you for ever.
All — Amen.

THE CONCLUDING RITES

ST PAUL’S