



## **Homily - Celebration for the Croatian Catholic Community - Baptism of the Lord**

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth  
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Readings: Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Psalm 29:1-4

We have just listened to the story of the baptism of Jesus from the Gospel of St Mark. In many ways, it is a strange story and I am sure that many of us are as puzzled by it. As Catholics, we have always understood that one of the main reasons for baptism is so that we can be set free from the power of original sin. But, as Catholics, we have also always known that Jesus was always, from the moment His human life began, free of sin.

Today, therefore, we might be inclined to say to the Lord, "*Why were you baptised? You had no sin to be forgiven. You had no need of repentance and conversion. You didn't need to be baptised, as those who listened to John the Baptist's message did, and as we do*".

The baptism of Jesus is certainly something not easy to understand but perhaps part of the explanation lies in what happens next in the story. As Jesus comes up out of the water, the clouds part, the Spirit of God descends on Jesus, and the voice of God the Father is heard: "You are my son, my beloved. My favour rests on you".

Perhaps what is really important, then, at the baptism of Jesus which, of course, takes place at the beginning of His public ministry, is the proclamation by God that this Jesus, seemingly a man like everyone else, though an extraordinarily good man, is, in reality, so closely at one with God that God calls Him His beloved Son and reveals the presence of the Holy Spirit who is always with Him. Just as Jesus is proclaimed as the Saviour of all people, and not just the Jews, when the wise men, non-Jews, come from far away to worship Him in Bethlehem and, just as Jesus is revealed as the bringer of life and joy into people's lives at the Wedding Feast of Cana, so, today, Jesus is revealed in all His glory as the only Son of God and the bearer of the Holy Spirit. The baptism of Jesus is the first announcement of what St Mark's Gospel will tell us over and over as the story unfolds: that Jesus is not just another very good man - Jesus is God among us.

When God speaks so clearly, He is calling to us to respond. Certainly, the people present at the baptism of Jesus would have felt the need to respond to what they had seen and heard, just as those who would encounter Jesus over the next three years of His life and ministry would also have to respond – either positively or negatively. But God speaks to us, too, and He is looking for our response to Him. What will our response be like? What is it like at the moment?



Our faith is not meant to be only a thing of the mind – it is much more than simply a set of teachings we have to believe in. Our faith also is meant to be a thing of the heart: a sincere and enthusiastic and ongoing response to the incredible truth that God, who is the creator and sustainer of everything that exists, has come among us as one of us in Jesus so that, in Jesus, we might see the face of God, hear His voice, experience His love and respond to Him in faith.

On another occasion during the life of Jesus, His transfiguration, the same words from God the Father were heard: "This is my son, my beloved. My favour rests on him". However, on that occasion, God went on to say, "Listen to Him".

This, of course, is the response which God is asking of us as well. And so, perhaps today's celebration puts this question before us: in my day-to-day life, with all its challenges and its possibilities, are the eyes of my mind and my heart fixed on Jesus? If He really is God's Son, as today's Gospel proclaims Him to be, isn't this precisely where my life should be centred? Am I really listening for His voice each day? And this, of course, leads to an even more challenging question: what am I doing to respond to this voice, to this call of the Lord in my life?

There are so many ways in which we hear the voice of God's beloved Son. We hear it in the scriptures, both when they are read during Mass and when we find time, if we ever do, to quietly read the Gospels ourselves. We hear this voice in the community of faith, the Church, and in the ways in which, through the teaching of the Church, God reveals His will and His plan to us. We hear God's voice in the people with whom we live and so often, too, in the people we encounter each day. We hear God's voice, too, as Pope Francis reminds us so often, in the voice of the poor, the oppressed, the lonely and the marginalised. And, of course, we hear God's voice in the quiet of our own hearts and in our moments of reflection and remembering.

We do, of course, need to train ourselves to listen – and, in our noisy and busy lives, this is not always easy. Apart from the obvious fact that, when we come to Mass, we have the scriptures read and explained for us, one of the reasons why the Church is so insistent on the need to come to Mass each week is because it provides us with such a precious opportunity to step aside from our normal activities and enter into a different space where everything is designed to help us enter into a time of communion with God.

Today, then, let us allow the Gospel to challenge us, not in an accusing way, but with a precious invitation: in Jesus, we encounter the Beloved Son of God and come to know God, and His love for us, in a new and powerful way: why would we not want to listen to Him and then respond to Him with love and in faith? May 2015 be a year in which each one of us does our best to do precisely that.