

Sunday Homily

Title Homily on Fulfilling Righteousness

Date: January 11, 2026

Sunday: Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

Scripture: Matthew 3:13-17

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Text: Scripture commentaries often reduce the passages on the Lord's baptism to a dispute between followers of the Baptist and followers of Jesus. Christians assert that the lesser figure baptized the greater. Followers of John would disagree (and there are still followers of the Baptist called Mandaeans). Strange, how long humankind can carry on an argument. I've met people who are still fighting the Civil War. Peoples of Eastern Europe have fought for centuries. In the Middle East, people have fought for millennia. Many people carry on long-standing disputes with a family member or neighbor. So, it is not surprising that some teachers and preachers recall the centuries-long argument about the Lord's relationship to John. Assuming that John and Jesus were above pettiness, however, let's turn to the event itself. The baptism of Jesus is a profound statement on our salvation proclaimed at the very beginning of the Lord's public life.

Jesus said his baptism was "to fulfill all righteousness." John, then, helped Jesus demonstrate his embrace of humanity, even humanity in its sinfulness. With John's assistance, Jesus's baptism affirms the truth of the Incarnation, the truth of God-in-the-flesh. For our salvation, Jesus takes on our humanity. In so doing, Jesus raises the valuation of the human person in every way imaginable. The Lord uplifts us body and soul, individually and collectively, spiritually and materially. He enhances our lives as political and economic actors, as seekers of knowledge, truth, and wisdom, as beings who need others, as those who love and are loved.

John's baptism was for the remission of sins. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus embraces humankind even in this act about human sinfulness. It is the Lord's way to save all of humanity.

I know that Jesus is like us in all things BUT SIN. Jesus did not need John's baptism because He sinned. His baptism shows his solidarity with us and therefore his desire to save us. Scripture confirms this idea. St. Paul wrote: "God proves his love for us in that we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). And St. John wrote: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:16/17). Jesus's baptism for the forgiveness of sin is a public, visible demonstration of the Lord's solidarity, his love, for all humankind.

The repercussions of this moment are amazing. First, it addresses those who have had Catholic guilt drilled into them, those who think some sin of their youth is unforgivable, and those who feel beat down by preachers and teachers. The truth of the Incarnation says Jesus embraces us even though we are still sinners. In his love, he forgives. Please accept the love of Father and Son.

The Lord's embrace is not only to heal the wounds of sin but also about our salvation, our possibility and potential in this world as we anticipate the next. The Catechism quotes leading Christian thinkers through time who affirm this truth. For instance, St. Athanasius wrote: "For the Son of God became man so we might become God" (para. 460, p. 116). This means we can aspire to God's own attributes—God's love, empathy, compassion, God's truth, His goodness, God's peace. We will fall short. But the truth of God-in-the flesh is the truth of our salvation, our being raised up for life in this world while anticipating the next.

Let's think back to the opening of this homily, about protracted fights and arguments.

United to Christ, judging and condemning others is not inevitable. We can aspire to forgive and reconcile. Understanding, tolerance, and acceptance are God-given attributes. In time, we can learn that people who differ with us add possibility to us. Peace becomes workable.

In a couple Sundays, we will read parts of the Sermon on the Mount. Justin Martyr, who was born around 100 AD, said the Sermon on the Mount was the primary text for those who wish to convert to Christianity. And he asserted that it teaches the necessary Christian way of life if we call ourselves disciples. We will not finish the entire Sermon before Lent begins. I invite you to try reading it in one sitting. You can find it in Matthew chapters 5 through 7. No text in Scripture or elsewhere better calls humanity and each of us to our full potential. The Sermon is Christ calling us to live the truth He demonstrated at His baptism: "The Son of God became one of us so we might become God."