

## BAPTISM, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

R.C.I.A. [chpt. 13 – 14]

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A great light was brought into the world by the star of Bethlehem. Its light dispelled a darkness over the whole world, so people of good will could find their way to truth, find their way to the Savior.

In the Gospel by Mathew 3:13, the great light also illuminates the minds of mankind. The heavenly signs of Jesus' Baptism are the opening of the heavens and the appearance of the Holy Spirit in the bodily form of a dove. The statement, "beloved" points to the special relationship Jesus enjoys with His heavenly Father. The focus of the reading is on the empowerment of Jesus by the Holy Spirit; the empowerment of light.

All too often many see Baptism as an entrance requirement for salvation. This concept causes us to fall into darkness, a fundamentalist trap of looking for the correct words of "being saved" and accepting Jesus as a "personal savior." When we do this we limit our understanding of salvation to saying the right religious words and doing the right religious things. The focus of righteousness is for the glory of God, not to sneak into heaven. Isaiah reminds us that the way we will recognize salvation is not by words but by actions of justice.

Salvation is happening when the blind are helped to see; when prisoners are freed; when light is brought to those in darkness. The people who are saved are not necessarily those who can recall the exact day of their Baptism, or recount the time they accepted Jesus as their personal savior. The people who are saved can be recognized by their actions of justice. The saved are those who LOVE as their God LOVES, without condition. Baptism is a sign of God's unconditional LOVE, not a legal requirement that must be performed. Anyone who fears God and acts with justice is acceptable. There are many lights that shine in the world today

leading many astray; many with good intentions go round and round in circles getting nowhere closer to God.

There was a young woman driver who was instructed by her father when driving in a snow storm always follow the lights on the snow plow, it will eventually get you home safely. One day while she was shopping, there was a blinding snow storm. Following her fathers' advice she followed the first snow plow to pass by. She followed the snow plow back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. Finally the snow plow stopped and the driver got out and came back to her car. He said to the woman "I noticed you are following me, is there anything wrong?" "No", she replied, and she told him what her father told her to do in a snow storm. He replied that it was fine with him but when he finished plowing the parking lot he was going to another parking lot.

So we can see we must follow the right path and see the right light to follow, not one that just illuminates the easy path. What light are we intent on following? The fact that salvation is the pouring of water over our heads and nothing more is needed? The formality of attending Mass once a week and saying I have fulfilled my requirement! Then we are following a false light. To be saved means that with our entire hearts and souls and bodies we do our best: freely, willingly, hopefully, cheerfully to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. Then we come to realize that God, who is all LOVE, is AWESOME. We are baptized into this awesome God. We are committed to this awesome God.

To understand this awesome love, need we look no further than His crucified body on the cross. His outstretched arms call to us; "Look what I have done because I love you" What more could Jesus have done to show the light of truth? As Jesus told His apostles: "Come follow me, for I am the Truth, the Light and the Way." This is awesome. I will even share my body with you in the Eucharist. This is also awesome! I forgive you for what your sins have done to me. This again is awesome! I love you in spite of your

shortcomings. This is again awesome! I impart my grace to you in the sacraments of my church. AWESOME.

If we cannot give thanks for these gifts of wonderment, then we are ungrateful! If we cannot spend some time in thanksgiving, then we are ungrateful. When we receive a gift the least we can do is say "thank you" and maybe write a note of appreciation. When we receive the awesome gift of the Eucharist, the least we can do is to return to our seats and meditate on this awesome experience. It is the height of ingratitude to eat and run. It is a lack of true love; for our faith calls us to be lovers. Love wants to be together, not to run away from each other. Lovers want to share; they cannot bare to part. They want to please each other. They want to be proud of one another. To be separated is to be in agony. To be IN love and not have love returned is agony. Love is an awesome relationship. This is how God sees us. How do we see God?

The coming to Mass is not the paying of our weekly dues to God for His many favors. It is not a means of getting Him off our backs for the rest of the week. Mass is our love relationship. It is a sign of our love and gratitude for all His goodness. It gives us the internal energy we need to be lovers. It pours Gods' love and strength into us so we can help people have a good day so that they see Gods' light shine from our lives into theirs.

At Jesus' Baptism the heavens were opened and God's light shown upon Jesus and the whole world. We are people of that light. We do not walk in darkness when we follow this light and the message of love and forgiveness that radiates from it. The world shines a false light that leads us from God and leads us in circles. We must discern the true light that radiates from heaven and from the wounds of our savior's hands and side, and by the grace that comes from His Baptism of innocence and the light of the Holy Spirit. Renew your baptismal vows every day.