



Fr Tom says:

How time Flies!! One minute we are present at Jesus' birth – the next we are 30 years on and present at his Baptism by John the Baptist. Rather than a look back in time this is more of a look forward.

Not only does this event tell us how much Jesus identifies with our human condition but it helps give an insight into our own Baptism. The phrase that puzzled me and seemed so out of place in the Gospel was the reference to the heavens being torn apart which suggests violence and brutality. This is far from what baptism is and far from our image of Jesus. But further reflection leads us to think that not only does God send Jesus to us to reveal his great love for us but that God so much wants us to receive his love that he will rip away, tear away anything that imprisons us and hides his love from us – like a jealous lover defending his lover from any kind of harm.

And, what of the voice and the presence of the Spirit? Although we may not be aware, the Father says the same words to us in our Baptism that he said to Jesus. These words are usually expressed through our parents whose loving desire is that we share fully in God's blessing. Our Baptism makes it clear that God's favour rests on us and that we, too, like Jesus are given the Spirit in our Baptism and that the Spirit is sealed into our lives.

Once Baptised, Jesus is led into the desert for 40 days of prayer. It is in the wilderness where Jesus is alone with God his Father that he is able to clarify his mission and realises that, in his baptism, he has received all the graces he needs to fulfil that mission. How often did Jesus sneak off to be alone with the Father (in quiet prayer) to seek the Father's continued help and guidance? Jesus reminds us of the importance of Prayer in living that mission we have been given - which is why Lent is just around the corner to help us do this. Today's Gospel also helps us see that our mission is like that of John the Baptist – to prepare the way of the Lord and to open people to the Good News of Jesus Christ, to lead them into the company of Jesus. Jesus will look after the rest – we are the people who prepare the way.

Our other readings remind us of the mission statement by which Jesus lives, to give sight to the blind, freedom to prisoners; to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour: a mission that Jesus lived so generously and lovingly. This is our mission too and as you reflect on this in the light of your baptism, you will see how much you, too, are fulfilling this mission every time you reach out to help someone in need: – feeding the hungry (food bank); setting the oppressed free (visiting and helping the elderly – bringing them to mass etc.); freeing those in prison (work for justice and peace). Proclaiming the Lord's year of favour which is living the JOY of the Gospel as Pope Francis puts it and that, as we fulfil our mission in the example of Jesus, we are in fact true evangelizers (*and always have been?*)!!

(God's Love) is solid, strong and eternal. It 'manifests' itself in the Son of God who has come to save us. It is a concrete love made of works and not of words. To know God we must walk through life in love, love for our neighbour, love for those who hate us, love for all'. Pope Francis.