

Baptism of the Lord (B)

11<sup>th</sup> January 2015

'Doing the best for my child'

Is 42: *Here is my servant whom I uphold* Ps 28: *The Lord's voice resounding on the waters*  
Acts 10: *God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power*  
Mk 1: 7-11: *Jesus ... was baptized in the Jordan by John*

I baptized a Hindu baby once ... Let me explain ... I don't mean I made a mistake which baby I was supposed to be baptizing ... It was when I was in the Hospital chaplaincy in the East End. A call kept coming through from the Special Care Baby Unit, where they care for premature babies, that they wanted a representative of the Hindu faith to come and see a family. But although we did try to get someone on the phone numbers we had for Hindu centres, we had no luck. And still the call kept coming for someone (anyone!) to come over from the Chaplaincy. It was to see a couple whose little, premature, baby, was not going to live much longer. The doctors had tried everything, and there was now no hope that the child would live. As I walked out of the Chaplaincy, I said to Sr Lawrence who worked with me, "I could baptize this baby," though I didn't really think the opportunity would arise. I went to see the parents, a very young and very sweet Indian couple, quiet and courteous. I sympathized with them

over the terminal condition of their baby. I seem to remember that the nurses were keeping the baby alive just by a hand ventilator. The couple were happy I'd come, and I said I'd say a prayer with them. They replied, "just do your best for our child." And I said, "Well, as a Catholic priest, the BEST I can do for your child is to baptize her." And I explained what I meant by that — that it would be the Christian sacrament. They repeated that they wanted me to do the best I could for her, since she was going to die. So I did baptize her ... so in Christ she would live, in eternity.

Their words have always stuck with me: "We want you to do the best you can for our child." This is the essence of Baptism, and it's why it's the most important day of our life after the one on which we were conceived. At our conception, when the love of our parents 'pro-created us,' ... that is, when the co-operation of our parents loving and God's loving brought us into being, body & soul, we began our natural life as an immortal human being. Our Baptism day complements this coming into being: on our Baptism day we begin the new life as a Christian: "You have become a new creation and have clothed yourself in Christ," says the

Rite. We are made for God: our immortal soul is MADE for union with God. Our spiritual nature is MADE to be united to the Holy Spirit in Baptism. So, Baptism isn't some nice ceremony which you can take or leave according to what you feel like. It's the necessary way to union of our spiritual nature with the Spirit of our God & creator.

We see this when we find Jesus at the River Jordan with St John the Baptist. In other versions of this Gospel passage we hear St John wondering why Jesus is coming to Baptism, since He has no sins to be forgiven; no repentance to make to restore Him to God. He IS God! But Jesus *wants* to associate Himself with sinners in this way. He doesn't hear John's remonstrations and say, "Ah yes, you're right, I'll go off and do something else instead." If Baptism hadn't been essential to Jesus's mission, then He wouldn't have bothered to come that day to the River Jordan. That He DID come means it's important for us. He was baptized not to be sanctified by those waters, but to sanctify those waters Himself: to turn that ritual of John's into the Sacrament of Baptism. Through Baptism, then, we do the best we can do: to choose to enter life with Christ.

On the day I baptized that dying baby of Hindu parents, I could have the joy that this little girl would go straight to heaven: having been baptized into Christ in her life, she would enjoy the immediate life with Christ in heaven. I knew that God had allowed me that day truly to "do my best for that little child." She had fulfilled what she was made for: to be united to God for ever with Christ in heaven. We too have this one aim in life, and the doorway to heaven is Baptism. God showed us it without any doubt, in Jesus: we must make sure that we do our best for ourselves and our children and grandchildren in Baptism. Of course Baptism is only the start, but reflecting on its importance (holy water stoup; sprinkling at this Mass) reminds us to place a supreme value on our Sacramental life, which we began in Baptism — and hopefully it urges us to be faithful Christians every day, living up to that name, 'Christian.' Let us remember and celebrate our Baptisms on this feast-day ... and if you don't know your own Baptism date, go home and look it up, so that each year you can remember with gratitude the day it was that you entered into the hopes and graces of life in the Son of God.