



St. Thomas Church: established July 1, 1285 by King Vaclav II

Today's Prayer

Say this Prayer Today:

The more we call on the
Lord
the more we can feel His
Presence.
Day by day He draws us
closer
to His loving heart.

In this issue:

Gospel Reflection	1
Study of 1 st Reading	1
Upcoming Events	2
Profession of Faith	2
Study of 2 nd Reading	2
Announcements and	
Ongoing Activities	2
Collection Appeal	2
Baptism	2

January 10th and 11th 2015

The Solemnity of
Christ's Baptism

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St. Thomas Church

The Reflection on the Gospel

Today's feast should be a meditation not only on Jesus' but also on our own baptism. Most of us were baptised as infants and cannot be expected to have any remembrance of that momentous event. Whether we remember or not, it was and is truly momentous. As a sacrament- using transient symbolic actions and powerful words- it incorporates us into the one body of Christ which we profess to find in the Catholic Christian community. This sacrament as with all sacraments should never be taken lightly or conferred without inquiry. To appease a pious parent, spouse or to continue a "family tradition" is not sufficient reason for a baptism. As we shall shortly see we are asked some rather stringent questions regarding our faith or beliefs as they affect our lives and daily habits. Present in this assembly we are given an opportunity once more to profess our baptismal faith and so refocus our life's directions. So challenged, let us ask the Lord for his continuing grace and further strength to follow him whatever the cost.

The Priest then addresses the congregation with these words:

If your faith prompts you to renew your baptismal vows, you will be asked to reject sin or the power of evil and to profess your faith in Jesus Christ which is the faith of the Church or this community with whom you now stand.

Priest: Do you reject sin, so as to live in the freedom of God's children?

Response: I do.

Priest: Do you reject the glamour of evil and refuse to be mastered by sin?

Response: I do.

Priest: Do you reject Satan, the father of sin and prince of darkness?

Response: I do.

Study of the First Reading

First Reading: This study overviews three other studies: the Fifteenth, Eighteenth, and Twenty-fifth Sundays in Cycle A. Each of these studies focus on a piece of this poem. Taken together, the poem of Second Isaiah announced the divine invitations to intimate, yet communal dining and to repentance. As was mentioned in the other studies, many biblical scholars posit a Second Isaiah who wrote his prophecy for the Jewish exiles in Babylon. After fifty years of exile, the Persian conqueror, Cyrus, would come to free the Jews and send them home to Jerusalem. The words found in Isaiah 55:1-11 offered joy to the Jewish populace. In the dinner invitation of 55:1-5, Yahweh set a royal table as a gift to all the people: fatty foods, fine grains, and wine! Just as important, the people (not just the king) would share in the love that God gave to David in his covenant. God's love would now be shared with the entire nation. The invitation to royal table set the stage for the second call: repentance. [55:6-7] If God could be so generous with his faithful, he could also be generous with those who turned away from him. If the faithful did not understand God's mercy, that was because his logic was different than the "common wisdom" of righteous. (After all, God did not conduct "focus groups" among the believers in the pew for guidance!) [55:8-9] But underneath the joyful news was the reassertion of God's power. Fifty years of exile made the faithful question the power of their national deity. But Second Isaiah would have none of that! The generous invitations made to the faithful and the fallen-away would have effect! [55:10-11] God makes us the same offers he made so long ago. He invites us to the table, even when we stray afar. In fact, these invitations show his power, not his weakness. We can ignore these invitations. Or, we can take them for granted. Only at our own peril. If we take them seriously, we will witness the sheer power of our God. For we will see his love.

Coffee, Cookies & Conversation follow Sunday Mass in the Monastery Refectory off the Cloister Garden. **All are invited, especially our visitors.** Please contact, Fr. William Faix at wfaix@yahoo.com if you want to add announcements to the bulletin.

We would like to thank very much for the presents we have received this year from the people of your church. I am a foster parent with three girls (two teenage and one pre-school age) in a permanent foster care and they were really happy and touched to have received such lovely presents. If you can extend our thanks to the families who have actually provided the presents we would be very grateful. And of course, thank you for your personal involvement in this matter. We wish you and your church all the best in the new year and many blessings.

Families helped with the giving tree this year.

Profession of Faith

- P. *Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth?*
C. *I do.*
P. *Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?*
C. *I do.*
P. *Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting?*
C. *I do.*
P. *Let us pray.*
C. *God, the all-powerful Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ / has given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit / And forgiven all our sins. / May He also keep us faithful to Our Lord Jesus Christ forever and ever. / AMEN*

(As the Priest sprinkles the congregation with Holy Water, we reverently make the Sign of the Cross)

Study of the Second Reading

Second Reading: Tradition has identified the author of 1 John with the author of John's gospel. Indeed the terminology, grammar, and literary construction are similar. However, there were some differences. The gospel of John seemed to be a meditative reflection on God's Word that existed from the primordial beginning; this was God made flesh. But 1 John stressed the human side of Jesus whose "beginning" was his mission that initiated the Church. While both books most likely came from John's pen, we should note the different (and complementary) images of Jesus. Why would 1 John have such a concern for the humanity of Jesus? Apparently some within and without the community stressed Jesus as merely a heavenly messenger. Such a view matched the belief system of the Gnostics, a religious movement within Christianity that advanced in the first two centuries. Basically, Gnosticism held the material universe was evil. Salvation could only come in the spiritual realm. Special knowledge and ascetic practices were required to free oneself from the material and attain a spiritual nature. According to many Gnostics, Jesus was the heavenly messenger with such knowledge/practices. Notice that such a belief system completely undercut the birth of Messiah, his death and resurrection. All could be reduced to the image of Jesus, the spiritual teacher (or even the teaching spirit that "seemed" to have a body). In these verses, John grounds faith in a practical love (not a spiritual discipline). He also identifies the Christ with physical terms. First, notice how John connected faith and love (agape). He described the faith conversion as being "born from above" (an image that would return in the identification of Jesus). But that faith conversion was an act of love for the parent (God the Father) who loved his child (Jesus). [5:1] If the follower loves God's children (Jesus and his followers), then s/he must love God and obey God's commands. In other words, life in the Christian community demanded not an individual spiritual ascetic or a clique of spiritual "masters," but acts of charity. "Agape" in this sense was more than a feeling. It was a series of acts that built up community fellowship. [5:2] Second, John identified Jesus with three "testimonies:" the Spirit, water, and blood. The Gnostics would have no problem with the first witness, God's own power. Nor would they have a problem with the second witness, for Baptism (i.e., water) could be adopted as a spiritual exercise for the disciple. But the third witness was John's trip wire. Blood, alone and in combination with water, presented the humanity of Jesus in all its physical dimensions. Blood and water were present at the birth of a child. And both were present at the death of Jesus in John 19:34-35: But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness--his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth--that you also may believe. (RSV) In John's typical fashion, he paralleled the life of Jesus to that of the believer. As the Spirit, water, and blood pointed to Jesus, they would point to the believer. Water pointed to Baptism; blood pointed to Eucharist. Both were products of the Spirit in the life of the Christian. But, notice something more subtle in the parallel. As the Spirit moved Jesus from water (Baptism) to blood (his death), he led the believer from Baptism to persecution. Indeed, John foresaw the social shame of Christianity would become its strength. "The Church is built upon the blood of the martyrs." Suffering became victory. On the cross, Christ triumphed over death. Whenever Christians suffered for faith, they, too, share in the victory of the cross. [5:4-5] For John, this was a significant part of being "born from above."

Announcements and Ongoing Activities

*If you would like to receive a copy of the **bulletin** by email, please contact osaprag@augustiniani.cz

* If you would like to serve as a lector or Eucharistic minister at the Sunday mass please contact Ann at dalyaann@hotmail.com.

Training will be provided for those who have not previously served in these ministries.

* **Bible Study** takes place every Tuesday from 18:30-19:30 in Tagaste room.

*St Thomas' English Speaking Community now has a presence on **facebook**. Please 'like' our page and if you want to get more involved with the community, join our group!

* **Marriage preparation** course will take place Saturday January 17th, beginning at 09:15 am with lunch break and will conclude at 03:00pm

Baptism

The act of immersion or washing. In Holy Scripture it also signifies, figuratively, great suffering, e.g., Christ's Passion (Luke 12). It is the "first" sacrament, or sacrament of initiation and regeneration, the "door of the Church." Defined theologically, it is a sacrament, instituted by Christ, in which by the invocation of the Holy Trinity and external ablution with water one becomes spiritually regenerated and a disciple of Christ. Saint Thomas Aquinas says it is the "external ablution of the body performed with the prescribed form of words." The Sacrament of Baptism is absolutely necessary for salvation, because all are subject to original sin: wherefore Christ's words to Nicodemus, "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. (John 3)"

The chief effects of this sacrament are

- the impression of a character or seal by which we are incorporated with Christ (Galatians 3; 1st Corinthians 6)
- regeneration and remission of original sin (and actual if necessary), as well as punishment due to sin, and infusion of sanctifying grace (with its gifts).

Baptism is administered by pouring water on the head of the candidate, saying at the same time:

- I baptize thee, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

with the intention of Christ or His Church. The water must flow over the skin. These essentials are apart from the beautiful requirements of the Church for solemn Baptism. Infusion (pouring), immersion, and aspersion (sprinkling) are equally valid. The present ritual of the Latin Church allows for the first two, favoring infusion by the law of custom. Baptism of desire (*flaminis*) and of blood (*sanguinis*) are called such analogically, in that they supply the remission of sin and the regenerative grace, but not the character; the former presupposes perfect charity or love of God (therefore implicitly the desire for the sacrament), while the latter is simply martyrdom for the sake of Christ or His Church. Without the Sacrament of Baptism or martyrdom it is commonly taught that infants cannot attain to the enjoyment of the Beatific Vision.