

Baptism of the Lord



Baptism is the moment when we are drawn into the life of the Holy Trinity—the relationship between God the Father, Christ, His Son, and the Holy Spirit. This invitation is not extended because we deserve it or have done something to merit it, but is rather an extension of God's grace.

Saint Gregory the Theologian (whose feast day we celebrate on January 14) reveals an important truth about entry into the sacramental life. "Baptism is God's most beautiful and magnificent gift. It's called a gift because it's conferred on those who bring nothing of their own. It's called grace because it's given even to the guilty." Our experience finding new life in Christ through addiction recovery and the twelve steps runs parallel to the spiritual grace of our baptism.

We celebrate the Baptism of Jesus Christ this week and, while doing so, take the opportunity to embrace the promises of our own. In this week's Gospel Reading we hear:

It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Baptism is the gate which makes the Christian life possible. To be Christian means to be grafted onto Christ—a status that can be hard to swallow when our behavior seems to ignore the divine. Recognizing our own powerlessness over lust addiction and disordered sexual attachment confirms the plunge taken in our baptism and our constant need for a savior. We find our identity as beloved sons of God—a seal that cannot be tarnished by sin or shame.

Just like we witnessed the magi change routes after encountering Jesus, there comes a point in our recovery journey where we cannot return to where we had come from. Sure, we can revert back to old addictive patterns, but not without the place in our soul that has been claimed by God and awoken to the Good News.

Clothed in the grace of Jesus Christ while still in tune with our inherent powerlessness, we find identity. In fact, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes that, “Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark of his belonging to Christ.”

The first step of recovery is a crucial starting point where the insufficiency of our human resources is brought to light. This step is a tangible way to carve space in our lives to surrender to the new life made available by God’s grace. Many of us like to think that we can achieve this work on our own and are often dissatisfied with recovery until we fully surrender.

As we begin a new calendar year, now is a great time to re-engage or begin working through the twelve steps. It is suggested that, during the course of working through Step 1, we write down compromising situations where our behavior has put us and others in harm’s way. It is a simple, yet hardly easy, way of coming to terms with the darkness that our own will has propelled us toward.

Those suffering from an addiction may know too well that one symptom of our condition is denial that we do, in fact, need God’s help. Putting the work of recovery down on paper reminds us of that from which we have been delivered and aligns us with God’s most beautiful and magnificent gift.

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- In what areas of your life do you find yourself powerless?
- What is God revealing to you in the new year?
- What helps you embrace your baptism and identity as a beloved daughter or son of God?
 - What freedom do you find as a result?

The Grace of Baptism

"The different effects of Baptism are signified by the perceptible elements of the sacramental rite. Immersion in water symbolizes not only death and purification, but also regeneration and renewal. Thus the two principal effects are purification from sins and new birth in the Holy Spirit."

—*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (paragraph 1262)

Sunday Mass Readings this Week

1st Reading: Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10

2nd Reading: Acts 10:34-38

Gospel: Matthew 1:7-11