

Today we remember that moment when Jesus gave up life as He knew it, growing up in the small village of Nazareth, worshipping in the synagogue there, working as a carpenter. He leaves for the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist and launch His mission as Savior of the world. It's like a second Christmas.

John's Baptism is a baptism of repentance. Jesus is sinless, but He gets baptized as a sign He's taking on all the sins of history, and He will nail them to the cross and save us.

It's a big deal. The Most Holy Trinity is here for the occasion: Jesus, His Father speaking from the clouds, and the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove, to anoint Jesus, to strengthen Him for His ministry. The Holy Spirit will always be powerfully present at Jesus's side.

What about for us? Or are we Holy Spirit atheists? Do we not believe the Holy Spirit is powerfully present and active in our lives? Do we have any relationship with this Person?

Or are we Holy Spirit amnesiacs? We pray to Jesus and the Father; but is prayer to the Holy Spirit part of our lives? When Jesus ascended, He said the Holy Spirit will remain with us and be our Advocate to the Father, our lobbyist, our attorney, our agent. So the Holy Spirit isn't just an abstract idea. He'll take our prayers upstairs. Jesus is in Heaven; the Holy Spirit is right here. If we cultivate a prayerful relationship with the Holy Spirit, it will make a difference in our lives.

How so? What can this Person, the Holy Spirit, do for us in our everyday lives? Just as the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus to help His human nature, now the Holy Spirit helps us humans, too. From the Holy Spirit we receive four things: God's love, New Life, Justice and Holiness.

First, God's love. Most of our church prayers are to the Father, through the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the personified Love that holds together the three Persons, into one God. And this same Spirit holds us together, too, by pouring out the love of God into us at Baptism, making each one of us an adopted child of God, with whom our Father is well-pleased. The Holy Spirit wants to affirm that in each one of us every day: you are my child with whom I am well pleased. Don't we want to hear that? It's our true identity: each of us is a child of God. Just don't get a big head over it, okay?

The Holy Spirit gives us new life. When we pray The Nicene Creed at Mass instead of The Apostles' Creed, it ends with "I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life." When we welcome the Holy Spirit into our lives, we experience what Jesus did at His baptism: newness of life, vitality, a new relationship with God, a new sense of direction, and a new peace of mind and heart and soul. Prayer to the Holy Spirit pumps us up.

Living in the Spirit also adds to our courage, gives us a desire to work for justice, which means helping the poor, like Isaiah prophesied in our First Reading, and as Jesus went on to do in His ministry.

Lastly, holiness – not pious. The root of the word means “being different” – different than unbelievers. The Holy Spirit gives us an increasing desire for an ever-closer life with God; a hunger for it. The Holy Spirit gladly gives us what we need for that.

What Jesus experienced from the Holy Spirit, we can experience: the love of God into our broken hearts; we can hear those words “You are my beloved child”; we experience new vitality, and peace, new life into our relationships; courage to act justly, to help the poor; and holiness, being different, growing ever closer to God and becoming one of His saints.

Let’s not forget the Holy Spirit. Pray to the Holy Spirit for these experiences, and the Holy Spirit will renew us, and make a difference in our lives.

Holy Baptism of the Lord, January 10. 2021
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