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Baptism of the Lord C

This Solemnity of the Lord's Baptism recounts a number of revelations of the Lord Jesus. These revelations are sometimes called theophanies, and they are ways in which the Lord revealed Himself, so that after the Resurrection, the people would remember these episodes and come to understand what they meant.

The preeminent example of this would be the Transfiguration. The Lord led Peter, James and John up the high mountain, and at the top He was transfigured before them: His clothes and appearance became dazzling white. In a sense, His divine glory was manifested physically but in a partial way. The apostles did not see His divine glory in its fullness; no one can. However, this dazzling appearance did provide the Apostles with some glimpse, however small, to the Lord's divine glory.

The Transfiguration was prefigured in the Old Testament a few times. The best example is that of Moses, first whenever he met the Lord on Mt. Sinai in the bush that was on fire but not consumed, and then later on Mt. Sinai in the cloud and fire that covered the top of the mountain, and in which Moses received the Law. Elijah also climbed the same mountain, and recognized the Lord in a tiny whispering sound and then spoke with Him. Isaiah the prophet also had a vision of the Lord in the Temple, Ezekiel the prophet had a vision of the likeness of the Lord's glory on the plain in Babylon, and Daniel the prophet also had a vision of the Lord.

There are further three times before the Transfiguration that the Lord Jesus revealed Himself: in the Epiphany, whenever the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to the nations by the light of the star and they recognized that the Messiah of the Jews had been born; at the Wedding Feast at Cana, whenever the Lord Jesus revealed Himself to the disciples by the miracle He performed and the disciples recognized that the Lord could only have done this miracle by His divine power, and they believed in Him.

At the Lord's Baptism, the Lord revealed Himself to the Chosen People. We can notice that there are similarities to the Baptism of the Lord and His Transfiguration: the Father's voice in each case acknowledged the Lord Jesus as His Beloved Son. Also, there is a connection between the cloud which came down upon Mt. Tabor at the Transfiguration and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove at the Lord's Baptism.

At the His Baptism, the Lord Jesus revealed Himself and His divine glory by the Father's voice and by the presence of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove. St. Luke also adds that the Lord Jesus was praying whenever this happened, emphasizing the communion that the Son shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The Lord Jesus, at His Baptism, reveals that He is One with the Father and the Holy Spirit, not one Person but three Persons in One God.

What does that mean for us? Well, at every Baptism the Lord again reveals His glory. The Lord reveals His glory by implanting divine life into the soul of everyone who is baptized. The Holy Spirit does not come down in a cloud, nor does the Holy Spirit appear in the form of a dove. The Father's voice is not heard as it was at the Baptism or Transfiguration. Nevertheless, the Lord's glory is present, and the Lord reveals His glory in the way in which sin is taken away and new life begins.

The Lord also reveals His glory to us at every Mass. We cannot see the Holy Spirit present to bless the gifts that we bring. We cannot see the Lord Jesus present among us; however, that does not mean that He is not present. Whenever He comes to us in the Scriptures that we hear, He is present. Whenever He does bring us His graces in Holy Communion, under the appearances of bread and wine, there is a way that we can recognize His presence. We recognize that the Lord is present and that He does increase our faith in Him.

Whenever the Lord is present, Heaven is brought to earth. Eternity breaks into our world, and a mystery is present that transcends our thoughts and our attempts to explain it. Last week, for the celebration of the Epiphany, I asked whether we experience that transcendence at Mass: do we feel that we are transported beyond this world and that Heaven has come down to us? That should be the experience that Mass brings us. Do we feel that we are made part of the mystery that is present at Mass?

Perhaps this can be experienced more deeply if we spend time in prayer apart from coming to Mass. The Lord Jesus was praying whenever the Father spoke and the Holy Spirit came down to rest upon Him in the form of a dove. Whenever we spend time in prayer, the Lord opens up our eyes of faith to recognize His presence at Mass and to enter into the mystery that is present here.

As we approach the altar, we call to mind that the Lord has shared some small part of His divine life with us in Baptism, and He has drawn us into the mystery of His life with the Father and the Holy Spirit. We pray that the Lord will continue to sustain us in the mystery of His love.