

The Rev. Daren J. Zehnle  
St. Anthony of Padua Parish, Effingham, Illinois 62401  
13 January 2008

### The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

As we enter this year marking the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of our parish, we would do well to focus on the Sacrament of Baptism. It is in the waters of Baptism that we are born into the family of God and are made members of his Church. It is in the waters of Baptism that we pledge our loyalty, our love and service to Christ. Baptism is the gift of God by which he gives us his very own life and makes us his sons and daughters and because of this our lives are forever changed.

Baptism is not something that we do; it is something that we receive from God's own initiative. "Baptism, as we have seen, is a gift; the gift of life. But a gift must be accepted, it must be lived."<sup>1</sup>

A gift of friendship implies a "yes" to the friend and a "no" to all that is incompatible with this friendship, to all that is incompatible with the life of God's family, with true life in Christ.

Consequently, in the second dialogue of the Rite of Baptism, three "noes" and three "yesses" are spoken. We say "no" and renounce temptation, sin and the devil. We know these

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 8 January 2008. The remainder of the homily follows in an edited form.

things well but perhaps, precisely because we have heard them so often, the words may not mean much to us.

If this is the case, we must think a little more deeply about the content of these "noes." What are we saying "no" to? This is the only way to understand what we want to say "yes" to.

In the ancient Church these "noes" were summed up in a phrase that was easy to understand for the people of that time: they renounced, they said, the "*pompa diabuli*", that is, the promise of life in abundance, of that apparent life that seemed to come from the pagan world, from its permissiveness, from its way of living as one pleased.

It was therefore "no" to a culture of what seemed to be an abundance of life, to what in fact was an "*anticulture*" of death. It was "no" to those spectacles in which death, cruelty and violence had become an entertainment.

This "*pompa diabuli*", this "*anticulture*" of death was a corruption of joy, it was love of deceit and fraud and the abuse of the body as a commodity and a trade.

And if we think about it now, we can say that also in our time we need to say "no" to the widely prevalent culture of death.

It is manifested, for example, in drugs, in the flight from reality to what is illusory, to a false happiness expressed in deceit, fraud, injustice and contempt for others, for

solidarity, and for responsibility for the poor and the suffering; it is expressed in a sexuality that becomes sheer irresponsible enjoyment, that makes the human person into a "thing", so to speak, no longer considered a person who deserves personal love which requires fidelity, but who becomes a commodity, a mere object.

Let us say "no" to this promise of apparent happiness, to this "*pompa*" of what may seem to be life but is in fact merely an instrument of death, and to this "anticulture", in order to cultivate instead the culture of life. For this reason, the Christian "yes", from ancient times to our day, is a great "yes" to life. It is our "yes" to Christ, our "yes" to the Conqueror of death and the "yes" to life in time and in eternity.

Just as in this baptismal dialogue the "no" is expressed in three renunciations, so too the "yes" is expressed in three expressions of loyalty: "yes" to the living God, that is, a God Creator and a creating reason who gives meaning to the cosmos and to our lives; "yes" to Christ, that is, to a God who did not stay hidden but has a name, words, a body and blood; to a concrete God who gives us life and shows us the path of life; "yes" to the communion of the Church, in which Christ is the living God who enters our time, enters our profession, enters daily life.

We might also say that the Face of God, the content of this culture of life, the content of our great "yes", is expressed in the Ten Commandments, which are not a pack of prohibitions, of "noes", but actually present a great vision of life.

They are a "yes" to a God who gives meaning to life (the first three Commandments); a "yes" to the family (Fourth Commandment); a "yes" to life (Fifth Commandment); a "yes" to responsible love (Sixth Commandment); a "yes" to solidarity, to social responsibility, to justice (Seventh Commandment); a "yes" to the truth (Eighth Commandment); a "yes" to respect for others and for their belongings (Ninth and 10th Commandments).

This is the philosophy of life, the culture of life that becomes concrete and practical and beautiful in communion with Christ, the living God, who walks with us in the companionship of his friends, in the great family of the Church. Baptism is a gift of life.

It is a "yes" to the challenge of really living life, of saying "no" to the attack of death that presents itself under the guise of life; and it is a "yes" to the great gift of true life that became present on the Face of Christ, who gives himself to us in Baptism and subsequently in the Eucharist.

Whenever we present ourselves to receive the Holy Eucharist, the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ, we

renew our "no" to the anti-culture of death while we renew our "yes" to life, to the Church, to Christ.

As we celebrate one hundred and fifty years of Catholic faith here in Effingham, we cannot help but think of those who have gone before us, marked with the sign of faith. Our thoughts turn to their devotion to Christ and to the Church. As this parish was established the faith of the Church truly was the center and foundation of the lives of the parishioners.

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord and conclude the season of Christmas, may our lives, like those of our ancestors, be firmly rooted in the faith of Jesus Christ. May each of us say "no" to the pomp of the world and "yes" to Christ. Amen.