

**January 11, 2009 – Baptism of the Lord**  
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Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7	I, the LORD, have called you for the victory of justice...to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those who live in darkness.
Acts 10:34-38	God shows no partiality.
Mark 1:7-11	Jesus is baptized by John in the River Jordan

The baptism of Jesus was his defining moment. His life took a new turn. His baptism inaugurated his public ministry that would last for the next three years. His life at Nazareth working as a handyman ceased. At his baptism, the Father revealed Jesus as His Son. From his baptism onward, he spoke publicly of His relationship with God in the most intimate of ways. His life as God's Son would develop and unfold as an itinerant preacher proclaiming the Reign of God.

The defining moment of his baptism at the Jordan pointed to another baptism. It was his baptism in blood at Golgotha leading to his resurrection three days later. It was principally for that final baptism that the Holy Spirit anointed him. The baptism of Jesus at the Jordan River with all its consequences is also our defining moment as individuals and as a community. Indeed, it was for our sake that Jesus was sent and was baptized at the beginning and at the end of his public ministry.

Through our baptism, we believe that we have become members of Christ's Body. As his body, we share intimately with him all that happened at the Jordan and beyond. Through his baptism, Jesus willingly incorporated himself into our lives. Through our own baptism we have been invited to share in the divine life of the Holy Trinity. Our openness to God allows us to progress in living our baptismal vocation in Christ in all that we experience, think, decide and do. May God grant us the grace to collaborate in Christ's mission of love and service that was inaugurated at the River Jordan.

For more than a year now I have lived and served in a parish community in Ciudad Juárez, across the Mexican-U.S. border from El Paso, Texas. What a tremendous difference in life from one side of the Rio Grande to the other! The city of Juárez has had the reputation of being the most violent city of Mexico, and unfortunately it has lived up to its notoriety this past year having more than three times the number of homicides than last year. Of all the violent crimes committed in Mexico since January one-third have taken place in this city.

Most of the violence is explained by the competition of warring drug cartels whose operations have been made more difficult by the Mexican government's campaign against the trafficking of illegal drugs. There is a sense of lawlessness here which overwhelms the local government as well as so many people who are struggling to make ends meet. I think of how all of this violence is due to some extent of the market for drugs in the United States. At the same time deadly and sophisticated firearms, manufactured in the U.S., get smuggled into Mexico and into the hands of drug lords.

All this reminds me of the social-political situation in which Jesus lived. The sense of impotence due to the injustice of the Roman authorities must have been so tangible for

him. The gospel states that he felt compassion on the crowds for they were like sheep without the shepherd. In such a situation Jesus performed his ministry of preaching God's love and performing signs corresponding to what he was proclaiming. All of this was inaugurated by the anointing of the Holy Spirit at his baptism. In an ever progressive way Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah in our first reading: "I will make you as a covenant to the people, and as a light to the nations, to open eyes that do not see, to free captives from prison, to bring out to light those who sit in darkness."

Christ's mission that we share is that every single member of humanity be counted among God's children and experience the reality of Divine love and kindness. St. Peter marvels at this wonderful divine design in the second reading. Through various supernatural circumstances, Peter and his companions find themselves in the home of the Roman centurion, Cornelius. In his wildest dreams, Peter would never have seen himself willingly enter a home of a non-Jew. But God opened his eyes and his heart to the point that Peter declares that God shows no partiality. All are called to be his beloved children. God still has his plans beyond our comprehension. What a blessing to be agents of God's mission just as Peter was!

One way to do this is through prayer for those in public authority. In just over a week, President-Elect Barack Obama will be inaugurated to his new office to serve our country. As a Christian he is also celebrating today's feast, reflecting on the significance of Christ's mission for him not only to serve our country, but to be in league with leaders of other nations to be mindful of those in most need.

Now at this Eucharist, we will stand to make our profession of faith renewing the vows of our baptism, the defining moment of our lives, so that we can be faithful in being open to the work that the Holy Spirit wants to do in us, serving those to whom we have been sent.

### **For more information:**

As we wrap up our 2008 elections project, we encourage all to consider our educational work as just beginning. It is important to put our concerns for people living in forgotten communities around the globe before President-elect Obama and the new House and Senate. Read Maryknoll's important policy goals outlines in "Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world" and schedule an appointment with your new representatives today.

Email for a copy, or find the election guide here:  
[www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm](http://www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm)

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