

The scene of the Lord's baptism inaugurates the public ministry of Jesus. Before Jesus is introduced to the people with the good news of the kingdom, God is introduced as his Father. Jesus must overcome the reluctance of John the Baptist because he wants to be baptized by him. The dialogue shows the unease of the early Christians who cannot deny the fact of Jesus' baptism, but they see it as a meritorious decision on the part of Jesus. He accomplishes this rite of repentance as an act of righteousness. At his baptism Jesus fulfilled the will of God and for this reason God recognized him as his beloved son. *Fulfilling all righteousness*, being faithful to the will of God in all things, leads to becoming intimate with God. Before being proclaimed Son, Jesus does what God wants, even if it is not understood by men. Whoever seeks to do the will of God in everything, *to fulfil all righteousness*, will be recognised by God as his son or daughter. It does not matter what others think. What matters is to do what God asks of us.

13 **At that time: Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him.** 14 **John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"** 15 **But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness."** **Then he consented.** 16 **And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him;** 17 **and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."**

1. Read: reflect over and over again on the text. *What is the text saying?*

The text describes the baptism of Jesus in two short scenes. In the first, Jesus comes to John and has to overcome John's reluctance. In the second, Jesus is proclaimed beloved Son by the Father. The conciseness of the account makes the scant information all the more significant. We should pay attention therefore to the details.

In the first scene Jesus is the undisputed protagonist. It is he who goes to the Jordan, who wants to be baptized, and who succeeds in convincing John the Baptist. *Fulfilling all righteousness* is his motive for acting. For Jesus, Baptism is not a stage in conversion but the fulfilment of righteousness.

In the second part also, Jesus continues to take the initiative, except at the end. He comes out of the river and sees the Spirit descending upon him. However the voice from heaven - the voice of the Father - concludes the scene: the one who wanted to *fulfil all righteousness* is proclaimed the beloved Son of the Father.

Three observations may help us to understand the meaning of the text:

- a) The narrator does not describe the actual baptism (he simply says '*as soon as Jesus was baptised*'), but concentrates on what went before and what came after it. He is not interested in the fact, but only in its significance.
- b) In the introduction, Jesus is the protagonist. He allows himself to be baptised by his own conscious, deliberate decision. In the conclusion it is God who speaks, identifying Jesus as the beloved Son and himself as the Father whose favour rests on Jesus.

- c) Jesus wants to be baptized in order to *fulfil all righteousness*. And as soon as Jesus was baptized, God recognises him as his own Son. *Fulfilling all righteousness* must be something great if the one who does it becomes a son of God! Thinking only of this text, what does it mean to *fulfil all righteousness* by being baptised?

2. Meditation: apply the text to your own life. *What does the text say to me?*

As often happens, the text can be applied in two ways, which, however, are not mutually exclusive:

- a) The Christological approach: concentrate on Jesus and meditate carefully on his person and on who he is for us.
- b) The experiential approach: look at myself, identifying myself with Jesus, as one who is baptized and a child of God, concentrating more on what I am for God.

In both approaches, we should bear in mind that it is Jesus who asks to be baptized and manages to convince the Baptist, because he is determined to *fulfil all righteousness*. The figure of John the Baptist is marginal. Secondly, it is God who proclaims himself the Father whose favour rests on Jesus, as soon as Jesus was baptized. More than his baptism it is the will of Jesus to *fulfil all righteousness* which leads God to open the heavens, cause the Spirit to descend and proclaim Jesus his Son. God responds to the decision of Jesus to *fulfil all righteousness* by opening the heavens with his voice, filling Jesus with his Spirit, and presenting himself as the most loving Father.

Some questions may help us to apply this message to our lives:

- Does the baptism I received drive me, as it drove Jesus, to *fulfil all righteousness*?
- What is my commitment to living my baptism? What concrete consequences in my daily life show that I have been baptized?
- Jesus did not allow himself to be dissuaded by the objective arguments of John the Baptist and he *fulfilled all righteousness*. What are the arguments – practical or theoretical – that keep me from *fulfilling all righteousness*?
- God spoke, sent his Spirit and declared Son the one who had chosen to be baptized in order to *fulfil all righteousness*. If God does not speak, if I do not see the Spirit descend on me, and if I do not feel myself a beloved son or daughter, is it not because I do not live my baptism by seeking to *fulfil all righteousness*?
- How can I make my life as a Christian a search for righteousness?
- What must I do for God to see me as his son or daughter?
- Those who seek righteousness make God speak, see the Spirit descend and know that they are children of God. Can I imagine any greater recompense?
- Why then do I not begin immediately to seek righteousness? I know what seeking righteousness will do for me (let me hear God speaking, possess his Spirit, enjoy his favour). Do I know what it is that hinders me from seeking righteousness?