

## DAY #32: Contemplation

## THE BAPTISM OF JESUS AT THE JORDAN [158; 273]

As with all contemplations, we have the following steps:

1. Place oneself in the presence of God (as we always ought to do, this is first of all a prayer!)
2. Preparatory Prayer (beg God for grace)
3. History (consider the background of the mystery)
4. Composition of Place (an image in the imagination to help us stay focused)
5. Petition (the 'form' of the meditation; the 'what' I'm asking for; the 'fruit' I hope to obtain)
6. The Points (here, they are on the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan)
7. Colloquy (our dialogue or conversation with God).
8. Examination of the Meditation (a good practice to conclude every meditation or contemplation)

First, place oneself in the presence of God:

[75] - *I will stand for the space of an **Our Father**, a step or two before the place where I am to meditate or contemplate, and with my mind raised on high, **consider that God our Lord beholds me**, etc. Then I will make an act of reverence or humility.*

*Preparatory Prayer:*

[46] *The preparatory prayer is to ask grace from God our Lord, that all my intentions, actions, and operations may be purely ordered in the service and praise of His divine majesty*

### Preludes

1 – *History* - *Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"<sup>5</sup> But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now; for it is **proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness**." Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." (Mt 3:13-17)*

2 – *Composition of Place* [103]: This is a mental representation of the place. Here, in our imaginations, we should see the River Jordan, with the many people who are gathered together. We can see John the Baptist, in accord with the description given in the Gospels, as Mark tells us "John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey" (Mk 1:6).

We can imagine the geography of the place. Although Palestine is a dry land, on the banks of the Jordan there is vegetation. There are also the characters: John the Baptist, preaching conversion and baptizing; many people with different attitudes, from different conditions. And Jesus is also there.

\*\*3 – *Grace*: Here the petition will be is to ask for light to know intimately my Divine King Who has become a Man for me, and grace to love Him and follow Him in poverty, suffering, and humiliations.

### CONTEMPLATION OF JESUS' BAPTISM

***The steps are always to: 1 – see (picture), 2 - listen (radio), 3 - watch the actions (video) and then → reflect on self***

Who is here? Jesus; Mary; John the Baptist; the people getting baptized; other criticizing the baptism; the Father, the Dove (the Trinity)

St. Ignatius gives a few points to break out the contemplation:

[273] **The Baptism of Christ: St. Matthew 3, 13–17**

**First Point** - *After Christ our Lord had bidden farewell to His blessed Mother, He went from Nazareth to the River Jordan where St. John the Baptist was.*

#### **Second Point**

*St. John baptized Christ our Lord. When he wished to excuse himself because he thought himself unworthy to baptize Him, our Lord said to him: "Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness."*

#### **Third Point**

*The Holy Spirit descended upon Him, and the voice of the Father from heaven testified, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."*

This account is also found in Mark 1 and Luke 3.

#### **General Background**

- St. John the Baptist has a very special mission (inclusion in Gospels; importance in Visitation; his birth too is marked by an Annunciation and a kind of miraculous birth and conception (cf. Luke 1:5-25; 39-44; 57-66; "Benedictus" (68-80)
- *And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins.* (Lk 1:76-77)
- And so St. John the Baptist marks a **transition** from Old to New
- The baptism of Jesus is also a time of transition – from Jesus' hidden life to His public life

#### **Some Thoughts on Prayer and Meditation**

As we move through the second week, we are hopefully becoming more familiar with this Ignatian method of prayer, of contemplation. It is important for the one meditating to try and labor through the points, rather than seeking everything to be "given" to them. St. Ignatius writes: *when one in meditating takes the solid foundation of facts, and goes over it and reflects on it for himself, he may find something that makes them a little clearer or better understood. This may arise either from his own reasoning, or from the grace of God enlightening his mind. Now this produces greater spiritual relish and fruit than if one in giving the Exercises had explained and developed the meaning at great length. For it is not much knowledge that fills and satisfies the soul, but the intimate understanding and relish of the truth.* [2].

Hence, as we move through these contemplations, it is very helpful to try and “engage” with the material, to ask questions, to ponder. For example, one can approach a meditation and ask the following:

### Questions for meditation

1 – What is happening? What does God say?

- What is the baptism of John?
- What was this farewell of Jesus to His mother Mary like?
- This was probably the first encounter of Jesus and John – what would this have been like for St. John?
- Why is Jesus submitting Himself to John’s baptism?
- How does St. John react to Christ?
- What happens in the descent of Christ to the waters?
- What does Christ express here?
- What virtues of Christ shine forth here?
- Why the Jordan? What other events happened here? (cf. the crossing in Joshua)
- How does St. John react to Christ?

Hence, we first begin by engaging with the scene. These questions can arise from going through our method of: 1 – see, 2 – listen, and 3 – watch.

Then we can begin to reflect back on ourself and see:

2 – What is God saying to me? (listen)

3 – What do I say to God? (prayer)

4 – What must I do to be more like God? (fruits, resolutions).

### Three main points we can use to ‘frame the scene’

First – Christ bids farewell to Mary (sacrifice, leaves all behind, even His blessed Mother)

Second – Christ is baptized (humility)

Third – The dove descends, Father speaks (Christ is divine)

## Supplemental Ideas

If one finds themselves dry in prayer, it can be helpful to read additional commentaries on a mystery, such as from the saints or learned members of the Church. Below are provided two, one from Servant of God, John Hardon S.J., and another from Pope Benedict XVI.

### (1) Fr. John Hardon commentary (revelation of Christ’s divinity; Christ announced, [here](#)) Christ’s Baptism and Humility

1. As described by St. Matthew we are told:

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John, at the Jordan, to be baptized by Him. And John was for hindering Him, and said, “It is I who ought to be baptized by thee, and dost thou come

to me?” But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Let it be so now, for so it becomes us to fulfill all justice.’ Then he permitted him.” (Matthew 3:13-15)

2. The meaning of Christ’s Baptism by John takes meaning only from two facts that:
  - John’s Baptism was the external confession of being a sinner.
  - Jesus was not a sinner.
3. John protested about baptizing Jesus:
  - He knew, already from childhood, who Jesus was.
  - John’s mother told Mary that she, Elizabeth, was not worthy to have the “Mother of my Lord to come visit me.” (Luke 1:43)
  - John had been sanctified, in his mother’s womb, when Mary, [carrying Jesus in her womb](#), greeted Elizabeth.
  - John had to have been [enlightened by the Holy Spirit](#) all through his life on the fact that Jesus was not only the Messiah but the Son of the Most High.

### Analysis

1. John therefore strongly pleaded not to baptize Jesus, but Jesus insisted. Why?
  - Because Jesus was beginning His public mission of redeeming a sinful world.
  - Because Jesus wanted to be humiliated.
  - Because Jesus wanted to symbolize His mission of Savior of sinners.
  - In the Jordan by being associated with sinners.
  - On Calvary by being crucified between two criminals.
2. The lessons for us are beyond counting:
  - We are so naturally concerned about what other people think of us.
  - We are so fearful of being thought less of by others.
  - We are so fearful of being demeaned in the sight of others.
  - We are so dreadfully afraid of being humiliated and will resort to all sorts of schemes to avoid humiliation.
3. Yet, here is the all Holy God choosing to be humiliated:
  - To teach us the value of humility
  - To redeem us, especially from our sins of pride.

### (2) Benedict XVI Commentary (Jesus of Nazareth)

Matthew goes on to report for us that “Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all **righteousness**.’ Then he **consented**” (Mt 3:15). It is not easy to decode the sense of this enigmatic-sounding answer. At any rate, the Greek word for “now”—*árti*—implies a certain **reservation**: This is a specific, temporary situation that calls for a specific way of acting. The key to interpreting Jesus’ answer is how we understand the word **righteousness**: The whole of righteousness must be fulfilled. In Jesus’ world, **righteousness** is man’s answer to the Torah, acceptance of the whole of God’s will, the bearing of the “yoke of God’s kingdom,” as one formulation had it.

There is no provision for John’s baptism in the Torah, but this reply of Jesus is his way of acknowledging it as an expression of an unrestricted Yes to God’s will, as an **obedient** acceptance of his yoke. The act of **descending into the waters of this Baptism** implies a **confession of guilt** and a **plea for forgiveness** in order to make a new beginning. In a world marked by sin, then, this Yes to the entire will of God also expresses solidarity with men, who have incurred guilt but yearn for righteousness. The significance of this event could not fully emerge until it was seen in light of

the **Cross and Resurrection**. Descending into the water, the candidates for Baptism confess their sin and seek to be rid of their burden of guilt. What did Jesus do in this same situation? Luke, who throughout his Gospel is keenly attentive to Jesus' **prayer**, and portrays him again and again at prayer—in conversation with the Father—tells us that Jesus was **praying** while he received Baptism (cf. Lk 3:21).

Looking at the events in light of the Cross and Resurrection, the Christian people realized what happened: Jesus loaded the **burden** of all mankind's guilt upon his shoulders; he bore it down into the depths of the Jordan. **He inaugurated his public activity by stepping into the place of sinners**. His inaugural gesture is an **anticipation of the Cross**. He is, as it were, the true Jonah who said to the crew of the ship, "*Take me and throw me into the sea*" (Jon 1:12). The whole significance of Jesus' Baptism, the fact that he bears "all righteousness," first comes to light on the Cross: The Baptism is an acceptance of death for the sins of humanity, and the voice that calls out "This is my beloved Son" over the baptismal waters is an anticipatory reference to the Resurrection. This also explains why, in his own discourses, Jesus uses the word baptism to refer to his death (cf. Mk 10:38; Lk 12:50).

Only from this starting point can we understand Christian Baptism. Jesus' Baptism anticipated his death on the Cross, and the heavenly voice proclaimed an anticipation of the Resurrection. These anticipations have now become reality. John's baptism with water has received its full meaning through the Baptism of Jesus' own life and death. To accept the invitation to be baptized now means to go to the place of Jesus' Baptism. It is to go where he identifies himself with us and to receive there our identification with him. The point where he anticipates death has now become the point where we anticipate rising again with him.

**Benedict XVI, Pope . Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration (pp. 17-18). PRH Christian Publishing. Kindle Edition.**

### *Colloquy*

I will think over what I ought to say the Three Divine Persons, or the eternal Word incarnate, or to His Mother, our Lady. According to the **light** I have received, I will beg for grace to follow and imitate more closely our Lord, who has just become man **for me**. Close with an Our Father.

May God bless you.