



FAITH FOCUS - Come to the water

In this week's gospel (Matthew 3:13 -17), John tells Jesus: I need to be baptised by you. Jesus replies: No, I need to be baptized by *you*. From a cynical twenty-first century perch this could be

seen as just so much polite posturing between a couple of preachers... after you... no, after you... a lot of fuss over nothing.

Today we could be tempted to say: Why not just skip the whole baptism business and register on-line at the church of your choice. Just leave your credit card number to cover those annoying collections and we'll see you next Christmas? An absurd suggestion... but hopefully it illustrates a point.

We must come to the water. We need to be baptised in water and the Spirit. There is no virtual reality option... no computer generated substitute. We must be cleansed... physically and spiritually... in the waters that flow over and unite the entire community of believers. Whether as consenting adults or as consecrated children, we must come to the waters to be claimed for Christ.

Again the cynic's rebuttal: What's the big deal? A little water... a dunk or a splash... a couple of prayers, what difference does it make? You're wasting a whole Sunday afternoon that could be spent watching a playoff game. But infinitely long after Super Bowl 51 is forgotten, the waters and

the prayers of baptism will still be etched on our hearts. The grace of God will remain... perhaps ignored, even profaned... but always undiminished as a constant source of strength and inspiration.

In this gospel we see that the tremendous power of baptism is evident right from the start. It is the first occasion in the Bible that unites the Trinity in full view and in celebration of God's love. In the form of a dove we see The Holy Spirit come upon Jesus to fortify him for his mission of redemption. We hear the voice of the Father acknowledging Jesus as his beloved Son and endorsing his ministry. And then there is Jesus. He arrives at the Jordan as a humble candidate for baptism and departs as the heaven-proclaimed Son of God.

It is a brief plunge into a river, but a giant step closer to realizing the entire purpose of Creation. As both God and man, Jesus initiates his public life, setting a loving, humble but purposeful tone that will mark his ministry... from miracles to parables, from Cana to Calvary. In these four brief verses, Matthew proclaims that nothing in human history will ever be the same. The Son of

God is among us. And we are bound to him in the water of baptism.

That is where our own baptism comes in. In John 3, Jesus tells us plainly: *Except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.* It doesn't get any plainer than that. Baptism is not a suggestion. Baptism is not an optional initiation ritual. It is God's own medium of saving grace. The Trinity, that was present at the Jordan, blesses each and every baptism today... welcoming infants and adults alike to the family of the faithful... washing innocent children and death-bed converts in the love of Christ.

The simple beauty and the awesome transformational power of baptism have been captured in song by another Matthew, contemporary composer Matt Maher. With full acknowledgement and gratitude to the author, here are just two verses of his powerful hymn:

Come to the Water.

*And let all who toil,
Let them come to the water.
And let all who are weary,*

*Let them come to the Lord.
All who labor without rest,
How can they find rest,
Except for the Lord?*

*And let all the poor,
Let them come to the water.
Let the ones who are laden,
Let them come to the Lord.
Bring the children without might,
Easy the load and light,
Come to the Lord.*

David F. Sellery