

BEING IN A STATE OF CONSTANT PRAYER

Introduction

My dear sisters and brothers, today as we celebrate the feast of the Baptism of Our Lord, we also recall, remember and relive our own baptism – the very first of the sacrament we received. The sacrament that gives us our identity as Christians, the sacrament that made us children of God, the sacrament that has also inserted us into the Christian community.

Homily

My dear sisters and brothers, we may have asked this question of ourselves at some time or the other: I come for Sunday Mass but nothing happens. There is no effect. I sometimes go for confession but I'm back again at square one – nothing happens. There is no effect. I received the sacrament of baptism but nothing happened. There is no effect. I've even sometimes tried to make a novena but nothing happens. There is no effect in me. I read the scriptures sometimes, and nothing happens. There is no effect on me. And some may ask, 'Why continue doing these things if there is no effect?'

The answer to this question is probably in the gospel of today. It says very clearly: All came to John the Baptist and all of them were baptised. Luke does not record any effect on any of these people. Nothing happens to them. They probably go back – it was like pouring water on a duck's back. Nothing happens. No effect. But the gospel says that something happens when Jesus is baptised. The gospel records that after his baptism, Jesus was praying. And when he is praying, the heavens opened and the Spirit descended, and there was a voice from heaven saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'.

What is it that distinguishes the baptism of Jesus from the baptism of all the others who go to John? It's the same person baptising them. They go to the River Jordan – it's the same waters that were used for baptism. They all heard the same preaching of John the Baptist. And for all of them, Luke records nothing happening. But when Jesus comes, at his baptism, he is seen praying. Luke uses the past continuous tense: he doesn't say, 'Jesus prayed'. He said, 'Jesus was praying' – a past continuous tense. He was in a state of prayer. And when he was in prayer, something happened which distinguishes his baptism from all the other baptisms.

In Luke's gospel especially, Jesus is presented as a person who is constantly at prayer. In Chapter 3:21, Jesus is praying when he was baptised. In Chapter 5:16, after he cleanses the leper, Jesus is seen praying. In Chapter 6:12, before selecting the twelve disciples, Luke says Jesus was praying. In Chapter 9:18, before Peter makes his profession of faith, Jesus is praying. Before the transfiguration, Jesus is praying. In Chapter 11:1, the disciples see Jesus praying and they ask him to teach them how to pray. Jesus' example inspires them to ask that question. It is only in Luke's gospel, Chapter 18:1, we have the parable where Jesus says, 'Pray always and never lose heart; never be discouraged'. In Chapter 18:10, in Luke's gospel only, it is recorded that the Pharisee and the Publican went to the temple to pray and what was the effect of their prayer on them. In the Acts of the Apostles also, we find references to Jesus praying. And so, Luke seems to emphasise Jesus as in a state of constant prayer, and there is an effect: the heavens are opened.

When we are in a state of prayer, something does happen. The heavens are opened and there is a possibility to connect with God. And that makes a difference in our lives.

Dear sisters and brothers, if we are asking ourselves: Why isn't something happening? I come for Mass, I hear the readings, I participate in the singing, I offer the sign of peace to those around, but nothing happens. Why does nothing happen? The answer is in today's gospel. Jesus is distinguished from all the others who received baptism. When Jesus receives baptism, the heavens are opened, the Spirit comes down on him and he is empowered to fulfil his mission in the world. It's not just a moment's prayer. Jesus is constantly in prayer, and that makes a difference.

When we come for Mass, are we in a state of prayer? I ask myself – when I celebrate the Eucharist, am I performing for the people or am I praying the words of the Mass? If I'm performing for you, nothing will happen to me and maybe nothing will happen to you. But if I pray, if I am in a state of prayer, if I am connected with God, then something happens: the heavens are opened and the Spirit, which is God's power, comes into each one of us.

Do we want to live our lives with power? Or do we want to live just ordinary lives? If we want to live with power, then let us make it a point to pray – not just to say one prayer and be satisfied, but to be in a state of constant connection with God. And so, when I walk on the road, I am in a state of prayer; I am connected to God. A lady is cooking a meal in the home. If she is in a state of prayer, connected to God, something happens for her – the heavens are opened. Each one of us has this possibility in our lives. If we are in a state of constant prayer, constantly connected with God, constantly living our lives in union with God, then we will be empowered with the gift of the Holy Spirit – the Holy Spirit that will transform us, that equipped Jesus for his mission and that will equip each one of us for whatever trials lie ahead.

God's power is open to us, the heavens are open – are torn open so that our prayer reaches God and God is able to reach us. May each one of us make a decision to pray constantly, to live our lives in constant connection with God, and that will empower us to live happily on earth, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Like Jesus at his own baptism, let us also be in a state of prayer, connected with God, and even now, as we pray to the Father, let us truly, from the bottom of our hearts, from right within ourselves, let this prayer arise to the Father: Our Father...



Fr Cleophas Fernandes
Parish Priest, St. Pius X Church