

This Sunday the Church celebrates the Baptism of the Lord. Why did Jesus have to undergo this baptism if he had no sin to cleanse? The evangelists do not dodge this question. Nor does John the Baptist himself – as can be seen from his reluctance to baptize Jesus. But neither the Gospels nor Christian tradition, which produced the Gospels and which follows them, omit this episode.

The narrative allows us to deduce that, in going to John for baptism, Jesus is showing that he too supports the plan devised by God to prepare his people by the words and works of his prophets. In this way our Lord fulfills “all righteousness”; that is, he does everything that God has laid down.

“At the heart of all temptations,” as Benedict XVI keenly notes, “is the act of pushing God aside because we perceive him as secondary, if not actually superfluous and annoying, in comparison with all the apparently far more urgent matters that fill our lives. Constructing a world by our own lights, without reference to God, building on our own foundation; refusing to acknowledge the reality of anything beyond the political and material, while setting God aside as an illusion – that is the temptation that threatens us in many varied forms” (*Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, 28). Meanwhile, our Lord says, “It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness,” meaning an unrestricted Yes to God’s will, as an obedient acceptance of his yoke.

May we be given to grace to say Yes to God’s will in our lives, which is made known through the teachings, Scripture, tradition, and Magisterium of his Catholic Church.

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