

Baptism of Our Lord, January 11, 2026

I have been present exactly one time for the birth of a child, and that was the day that I was born. [laughter] So, I don't have personal memory, but I believe what happens is that probably as soon as possible after the baby has been born, they put the infant into their mother's arms and probably if dad is there, he gets a chance to hold that baby pretty soon after that. Even scientists have seen that in studying all of this there is something very important about this, this time of bonding that happens. And also, it has something to do, eventually, anyway, with the child seeing mom and dad looking at him or her. There is something in receiving the parents' gaze, with love that is not just a nice thing that happens, but it is actually really important for the future development of this human being. You doctors out there can confirm or deny that what I'm saying is true. I'm pretty sure it's true.

We need to receive that loving gaze especially from our parents. And think about how in the continuing process of growing up then from newborn into successive stages, how much of the development of our sense of self relies on how we perceive our parents regarding us. How we think they see us. And so, for example, if our parents always seem disappointed in us, we start to take that on as part of our identity. "I am a disappointment. I am always messing things up. I can't do things right. That's what I perceive from mom or

dad.” Or if they are inattentive or they don't seem interested in what I've been doing in my life, I might get the idea that, “You know, I'm not worthy of love” or “I'm just a burden.” Or if parents only seem to love me when I am doing the right thing, when I am being obedient, and then I get the feeling that when I am not doing the right thing, they are repulsed or they might abandon me or something. Well, then I start to think that my worth is actually based on what I do, or how I perform. But as parents, if mom and dad show me how precious I am to them, and there are patient and nurturing as I grow older, stumble, and stumble, do well, do well, and stumble, their patience and love through all of that allows me to come to understand human dignity in a truer light. And I understand that it is not about doing things in order to prove that I am good enough to be loved or that I'm worthy of being loved.

So, it is very important for us to perceive how we are looked at. How we are regarded. We get a sense of identity from that. But it really stems from that relationship. What we are doing is we are learning what this relationship is about. Parent and child. And it is in that context of relationship that we start to understand who we are.

So, here is the news flash: “Parents are human.” [laughter] They are not going to do a perfect job of communicating absolute unconditional love and acceptance to their children. They will have moments of frustration. They have

moments where, you know, when maybe they are angry; maybe they do feel disappointed; maybe they are uninterested at times. Parents are human, and yet it is still true that we get a sense of who we are, even in our relationship God from our relationship with parents. So even when relationships with parents are not the best that they can be, we still have God to turn to and we can still have pain but right notion of who we are and how we are loved by God.

When I was in a retreat in October, this is one of the graces I was asking for from God. I was asking that I might receive more and more from God and the Father the gaze that defines me. I want to know truly and deeply who I am and who God made me to be, who God wants me to be as I continue to unfold in my life. But I want to clear out all that I have come to believe over the years that is not true. And we all need that. It is not just me. We all need to clear out the lies that we have come to believe about who we are. And at the end of that retreat, God did give me a lot of that grace. It is still a work in progress. But I realized at the end of the retreat how important this is for this spiritual life. How crucial it is for our Christian life to have an accurate notion or understanding of how God looks at us. Let me put it this way: think of God's heart as He looks at us. You have to come to a truer understanding of that because that is where we derive our identity and our sense of who we are in Christ - the way we live. It is the basis of our sense of mission and what we ought to do in life.

In today's Feast of the Baptism of the Lord really draws us right into that dynamic. The Feast of the Baptism is an event of revelation, and instruction, and exhortation. Of course, it is a continuing moment in this process, this trajectory of revelation of the Christ to the world, starting with the Conception, then His birth, then the shepherds, and then the Magi progressively unveiling the mystery of Christ to the world. And here He is, at His baptism, and His voice is heard by everyone who is there. *"This is my beloved son.* So, if there was any doubt as to the identity of Jesus Christ at this point, that doubt should be dispelled because God speaks from Heaven saying, *"This is my son."* So, Jesus is revealed as the Son of God, as being truly divine, the one with whom the Father is well pleased.

The Baptism is also a revelation of the humility of God. We already saw humility in the Incarnation, the birth of Jesus. But we see it in a very particular way as Jesus actually descends into the waters of Baptism with us. He does not just take on our human nature, which is, you could argue, enough. He actually is with us in the waters of Baptism even though He does not need to be baptized. He does not need the forgiveness of sins. He does not need repentance of any kind. But He is God with us. He is God with us, not just present to us; He is present to me. But He is God with us in the sense that "Are you with me or are you against me?" He is with me. He enters so completely into our human experience that He will even go to the waters of Baptism with

us and humbling Himself to receive baptism from John the Baptist who needs to be baptized by Jesus. John has a hard time accepting this. Rightly so. But it is an ultimate Baptism of condescension, humility, for Jesus to do this. And it is also a revelation of the relationship of the Son to the Father and the Father to the Son because the Father's voice is heard: *“This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.”* We see the Father delighting in the Son, and we see the Son, Jesus, receiving that gaze of delight from the Father, and that word, defining His identity, “This is my beloved son.” So, the baptism is very much a moment of revelation.

It is also a moment of instruction, right? Because as I said, Jesus didn't need to be baptized, but going into the water, the waters of baptism, He sanctifies the water for our sake, for our baptism, right? And He shows us; He gives us an example of what we have to do. So, you lead by example. If you want to be my disciple, if you want to be my follower, you also should be baptized. And not just for all the beautiful and wonderful things that Baptism accomplishes in our life - forgiving original sin, making us a temple of the Holy Spirit, joining us to the Church and so forth. But then we could actually enter into the same dynamics of the relationship of Jesus to the Father because we are incorporated into Christ; we become part of His body, members of His body. When God looks at us, He sees Christ, His son, the beloved because we are joined together. So, if we can enter into that relationship: “Wow! God looks at me that way?” God looks

at you that way. He says, “You are my beloved child – with you I am well pleased.” If we can really enter into that, we realize then that our identity stems from that. Our mission stems from that identity. So, there's instruction in that.

And then, along with that comes the exhortation. The exhortation is for everyone who is baptized, actually linked in those dynamics, right? Live in that relationship. Everyday realize that God is looking at you in this way. Not with disappointment. God does not regard you as a disappointment or a failure. God is not uninterested in you like, you're not worth his attention; like you are just a burden to burden for him. No, God is not tired of you. God will never be tired of you. And God is not only pleased with you when you are doing the right thing. He delights in you because of who you are. Sure, He does not delight in the sin, true, but He can tell the difference between the action and the person, and He always delights in the person, even if the person is doing an action that is not pleasing to God. God always delights in you. If we could just live in that, how powerful that would be? What a difference it would make. How easy would it be from all the other notions that we take along the courses of life? So, there is an exhortation - live in that relationship, live in the same relationship that Jesus has with God.

I mentioned that I was asking for that grace of the gaze during my retreat. I urge you and invite you also to ask for

that same grace. And ask for that grace every day to receive from God the Father the gaze that defines you. You know what your dignity is as a child of God so that everything in life stems from that sense of identity, having your feet firmly planted in it confident of your identity as a beloved child of God.

I tell you, if you ask for that grace, God will give it. I know in my own experience, God will give that grace and your life will never be the same.