

Dear Friends,

What is the best gift you have ever received? Was it a new car? A diamond ring? Some sports equipment? A cuddly little puppy? The more time passes, the more I can't help but contemplate what I believe to be the greatest gift that I have received. It is a gift that keeps on giving. What is it? Well, it was a gift given to me by my parents and that gift was the gift of faith through Baptism.

Now, I know what you are thinking. You are probably thinking . . . "Baptism? A gift?" You might even think to yourselves, "That's kind of a boring gift! I'd rather have a new laptop, or an HDTV, or a gift certificate for a pedicure!" Permit me to explain.

You see, the more I think about it, the more privileged I feel that I was incorporated into the Body of Christ through baptism. It was in Baptism that I received my faith. Because of my baptism, I belong to a community of believers. Because of my baptism, I have a profound relationship with a God to whom I can turn when things become difficult or who is a loving companion when things are just fine. My baptism initiated me into a life of faith that gives me the hope throughout life that I will one day live in paradise. Most importantly, salvation is offered to me through faith. What a tremendous gift it is to be a believer in the God of love!

Think about it. What if our parents had chosen not to give you and me the gift of faith? How empty would life be? There would be no Christmas celebrations, no Easter egg hunts, and nowhere to go in distress. There would be no spiritual sustenance through Holy Communion or strengthening through Confirmation. Life has a supernatural dimension because of faith. There would be no hope of eternal salvation if it weren't for faith. It is this dimension that gives ultimate fulfillment to our lives and everything pales in comparison to that!

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Jesus did not need to be baptized because He is God. Because He is God, He is sinless. Nevertheless, Jesus chose to be baptized by John in order that He might set an example for us as to what is necessary for salvation and to make holy the waters of all baptism. At the moment of His baptism, Jesus began his public ministry and ultimately brought to completion the act of salvation.

As we celebrate this wonderful day, we are reminded of the fact that our Baptism is a gift. Let us not reject this gift by falling into sin. Instead, let us surrender our lives to the life of grace and strive always to live in God's light. It is also a reminder of the importance of having our children baptized. If you have neglected giving your child the gift of faith, perhaps now is the time to celebrate this gift. If you are an adult and have never been baptized, I encourage you to take this step. You will never regret it! God bless.

Fr. Paul