

On this liturgical feast of the Baptism of the Lord, we would be remiss not to call to mind the immense gift of our own, individual baptisms. When we consider all of the things that baptism accomplishes in our life, it is obvious that Jesus would not have needed any of them. Paragraph #1279 of the Catechism states, “The fruit of Baptism, or baptismal grace, is a rich reality that includes forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins, birth into the new life by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. By this very fact the person baptized is incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, and made a sharer in the priesthood of Christ.” Therefore, why *was* Jesus baptized? Perhaps, as in everything He did, it was for our benefit.

Something reminded me of this recently in the most peculiar of ways. As part of a lecture some priests were attending, a video clip was shown from the classic Disney animated film, *The Lion King*. In it, the grown-up prince of the lions, Simba, is told by the wise baboon Rafiki that his father Mufasa was alive. When looking into a pond, Rafiki tells him he will see his father, but Simba protests, “It’s just my reflection.” Rafiki demands, “Look harder,” and upon the second glance, Simba’s reflection changes into the likeness of his kingly father and Rafiki remarks, “He lives in you.” At that moment, Mufasa appears in a vision

in the sky and Simba desperately asks his father how he is supposed to go on and Mufasa replies, “Remember who you are. *You are my son.*”

It had been at least twenty years since I watched that beloved movie of my childhood, but I realize now that there is no way I could possibly have appreciated that scene then as much as I did now, watching it as a grown man, a priest and a Catholic. Keep that image in mind and listen again to the scene of Jesus’ baptism from today’s gospel, “And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’” It is as if Disney were trying to reproduce this profound moment from the gospel.

If it was God’s will that, upon the birth of His Church, all of His future children would be incorporated into her life through the sacrament of baptism, it seems reasonable to suppose that what happened at Jesus’ baptism was meant to be a signal for us what would happen at ours. We have the tradition of believing that upon entering into the waters of the Jordan River, Jesus sanctified the waters of all of creation, which is why any pure water is validly used in baptism. If Jesus’ baptism would have this kind of impact on all future baptisms, could it be that the words of the Father which reverberated from the heavens that day were *also meant to impact our baptisms?*

Perhaps you have been to Niagara Falls. When you are standing at the falls, it is easy to tell a tourist from a resident of the city. The tourists can't stop looking at the majestic sight; the residents walk by without even looking up. When you see something, even the profoundest of things often enough, you get used to it and it loses its meaning. I think that if every time there was a baptism in the world, the skies opened and a dove descended upon the head of the newly baptized, and all present could hear the Father solemnly declaring, "You are my son; you are my daughter", even *that* would eventually lose its effect.

But my dear sisters and brothers in Christ, that doesn't make it any less of the reality! At the moment of our baptism, the Blessed Trinity does look upon us from heaven, and sees one of His cherished creations become a chosen child. We are adopted by the all-powerful Creator of the universe and given the name 'daughter' or 'son'. Do we ever give this much thought? There are good and logical reasons to believe that we are, in fact, God's creations; but it takes supernatural faith to believe, and be grateful for, what we call *divine filiation*, which in Latin means the fact that we are first and foremost God's children.

When in this life we become overburdened by disappointments and despair; when we are confronted by professional obstacles or personal setbacks; on occasions of great peace and joy, or on occasions of real fear and sorrow; we must never forget our deepest identity: I AM A CHILD OF GOD! A true spiritual

father of mine says something very profound about this identity of ours, “Divine filiation is a joyful truth, a consoling mystery. It fills all our spiritual life; it shows us how to speak to God, to know and to love our Father in heaven. And it makes our interior struggle overflow with hope and gives us the trusting simplicity of little children. More than that: precisely because we are children of God, we can contemplate in love and wonder everything as coming from the hands of our Father, God the Creator. And so we become contemplatives in the middle of the world, loving the world” (*Christ is Passing By*, 65).

In the opening prayer of the Mass we asked God to *grant that your children by adoption, reborn of water and the Holy Spirit, may always be well pleasing to you*. In this life, we must strive constantly to be pleasing to our Father and we will do so by hearing Mufasa’s words always whispered in our ears, “Remember who you are!” I am a son of God; you are a son or daughter of God. Nothing could bring us more confidence; nothing could bring us more joy. Remember who you are, and be pleasing to your Father!