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Epiphany 1 – The Baptism of Our Lord

### Matthew 3:17

## GOD'S WORD OF ACCEPTANCE IN HOLY BAPTISM

We desire acceptance. At school there's pressure to be accepted by our peers. Being employed is good, but being accepted by the people you work with makes it far more tolerable. People's approval can make us even more productive. Children need to be accepted by their parents. Nothing is more destructive to a child than if they are given the impression that they are an inconvenience to the parent's life. Yet, strangely, after the children grow up, it's the parents who seem to need acceptance from their children. It makes the parents somehow feel validated. All kinds of people demand acceptance from society. Some even try to legislate it. Sometimes, people's yearning for acceptance leads them into destructive behavior or ways of trying to compensate: addictions, promiscuity, work, humor, materialism, or entertainment.

But nothing here on earth adequately fills the void. St. Augustine correctly observed: *You have made us for yourself [O, Lord], and the heart of man is restless until it finds rest in you.* A psalm also says, *“As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.”* If we can find acceptance with God we will be complete. That's how we are made.

But the problem is, God doesn't accept us as we are. We sense it because God has programmed the voice of His Law into each of us called our conscience. He continually whispers that we haven't lived up to His expectations. In the Bible He shouts rejection: *“Your sins have separated you from your God.”* Sometimes it hits us like when we try to turn over a new leaf, but we fail or when some bad thing happens to us that reminds us of our sin. And so we feel insufficient, maybe unfulfilled, maybe sometimes just

depressed. That's just a little foretaste of what hell will be like. Hell is the ultimate rejection from God.

But God does fill our need for acceptance completely in Holy Baptism. Very often in a peer group you have to change and adapt yourself before people will accept you. But in Holy Baptism God lovingly makes the change in you so that you may be accepted by Him on His terms. And God's terms mean life, freedom from guilt, rescue from death and oneness with Christ and His Church.

Today we consider *God's Words of Acceptance in Holy Baptism.* First *He accepted the Son who was declared a sinner.* Secondly, *He accepts us who are declared saints.*

Baptism is for sinners. But Jesus had no sin. So why did He need baptism? He didn't. That's why John was surprised and said, *“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”* Though Jesus was not a sinner He submitted Himself to baptism as if He were a sinner. It's like the way you might feel no need whatsoever to go on a kiddie ride at the carnival. There's no thrill in it for you and it will only cost you. But you submit yourself to going on a ride meant for little children, like you are some little child, so that your children won't have to go alone and be afraid and they can have fun.

By submitting to baptism Jesus walked in our shoes. Though He had no sin of His own, He became identified as a sinner like us. You might say He borrowed our guilt, hoisted it onto His own shoulders, and began walking with it. All our shortcomings, faults, imperfections, baggage, skeletons in the closet, embarrassments, regrets, all the things that might make people not want to accept us, or that we have trouble accepting about ourselves or that God does not accept in us were pinned on Jesus. Jesus accepted the blame and the shame.

What began at His baptism culminated in His death on the cross. There God declared Him a sinner again. The sky went dark. The earth shuddered. Nature herself seemed to balk and buckle under the weight of all that resting on a single person hanging on a single

cross on a lone hill. Then God did the opposite of accepting Jesus. He rejected Him. He abandoned Him. He turned His back on His own eternal Son.

The words God spoke at Jesus' baptism: This is my Son whom I love, with Him I am well pleased -were His acceptance speech on what Jesus was about to do –an acceptance He enthusiastically demonstrated later by raising Jesus from the dead. God accepted the Son who was declared a sinner.

The result is that God accepts you and me by declaring us saints. The Bible says, “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” Because Jesus took our sinfulness with Him onto the cross, God, through our Baptism, declares you and me righteous, perfectly acceptable to Him.

God instituted baptism so that in a very personal, objective, tangible way you can know He means you. God accepts you – completely, without any hesitation, without any reservations.

You see, in His baptism Jesus mysteriously united Himself to us sinners. And in your baptism He mysteriously united you to Himself. Now everything that belongs to Christ was given to you in baptism and becomes yours through faith: power over death, the downfall of satan, the elimination of guilt, a perfect holiness before God, never-fading glory, honored status above the angels, a heart and will to match God's, the royal function of speaking for Him to those around us, your name etched on the gold-leafed pages of the Book of Life, in spite of all that the opportunity to humble ourselves to be a servant like He was, and have our efforts be received by Him with ecstatic delight.

To look at us, a person might only conclude that we are still a bunch of sorry sinners. But all those things are ours through faith – that is, by believing that they are true. God has accepted us. He has declared us to be saints. He wholeheartedly embraces us and makes us His own. His Spirit gave birth to us as children of God in baptism. Even now the Bible says the Spirit himself testifies with

our spirit that we are God's children. Like we are little Christ's, God accepts us.

If you still have it, sometime take a look at your own certificate of baptism. Look and see if your name is still on it. Then you can be sure that God accepts you. For Jesus' sake He called you by name in that Sacrament and said, “You are my son whom I love. With you I am well-pleased.”

When you suffer from kids dissing you at school, the badgering at work, unrequited love, defiant children, a nagging conscience, an indifferent spouse, the competitive social circle, the antagonistic in-law, the insultingly patronizing comment, or any other form of non-acceptance –even when your own conscience whispers all kinds of insecurities into your brain, remember that in your Baptism God drowns out all that noise with His own words: “This is my own whom I love.” You are home. You are fully accepted for eternity.