

Fr. Romeo Evangelista's Homily
January 12, 2020
The Baptism of the Lord (A)

In the Feast of the Epiphany, we saw the manifestation of the God – Infant to the nations through the Magi. In today's Feast of the Baptism of Jesus, we see another manifestation of Jesus – as Son of God and Servant of Yahweh.

Being sinless, Jesus did not really need the baptism of John as it was a call to repentance in preparation for the coming of the Promised One. Neither did John want to baptize Jesus. On the contrary, he wanted Jesus to baptize him. But Jesus insisted, saying, allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness. "Righteousness" here refers to the saving activity of God. And "to fulfill all righteousness" is to submit to God's specific plan. Jesus' acceptance of John's baptism signified his identification with sinners whom, in the Father's plan, Jesus was to redeem.

With the baptism of Jesus, He showed to all of us that it is only in solidarity and in humbling ourselves, that we can be truly part of God's loving plan of salvation.

When the Holy Father came to the Philippines in 2015, his main reason for coming was to visit the island that was hit by the strong storm. He came to condole with the thousands from that island who had lost everything to storm Haiyan the year before. Unfortunately, on his scheduled day for the Island, another dangerous storm threatened the area. Instead of backing out of the plan, however, Pope Francis pushed on. He asked to personally speak with the pilot-in-charge. After determining that there was an hour or two of safe flying time, he immediately told the pilot they would proceed as planned.

Upon arriving in the island, heavy downpour greeted them. The altar and sanctuary originally prepared for the Mass were windswept and drenched, so organizers of the Mass prepared a safer place underneath the stadium for the Holy Father. They told him he could preside over the Mass there – clean and dry – and the six thousand people gathered outside could watch him on a video screen. "No way" he said, "just give me one of those yellow poncho rain coats that everyone else has on". And he braved the rains like everyone else, until he too was wet to the bone.

Pope Francis didn't need to do these things, but the fact that he chose to do them meant everything for the people who awaited him, to whom he brought profound consolation. Jesus, who was also wet to the bone at the Jordan, didn't need to be baptized. God didn't even need to become man. But this is God's way of loving-humble service and a solidarity that embraces our entire human condition, mud and all. These are the themes that run through today's readings. How blessed we are to have a pontiff who makes us see what this can mean to people who seek to make God's presence known in our world today.

As Christians in this modern world, may the people feel God's love through our presence and actions, through our humility and solidarity with them. In this way, we will become part of God's plan to fulfill all righteousness for all His people.