

Baptised – imprinted with the image of Christ, and graced in the likeness of Mary

On this day when we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, it's good to reflect on the meaning of our own Baptism. As legionaries, we can reflect in particular on how Baptism not only brings us into the life of the Holy Trinity, and spiritually imprints us with the seal and image of Christ, but therefore also forms us in the likeness of Mary. She was the one most perfectly imprinted with the image of her Son, the one who, of all disciples, lived most fully in the life of the Holy Trinity; and so she is the model for living out our own baptismal grace.

It can be discussed which Sacraments Mary would herself have actually received. Regarding Baptism, she did not need to be sacramentally cleansed from any sin, original or personal. Yet Sacramental Baptism also imprints the indelible character, permanently marking the baptised with the spiritual image of Christ. It incorporates them into the Church (of which Mary is the pre-eminent member). And, it is the gateway to the other Sacraments, such as the Eucharist. So from those points of view it seems reasonable to think that Mary would have received the Sacrament of Baptism, conforming her as closely as possible to Jesus her Son. Indeed, there is a tradition going back to the second century that Christ himself baptised his Mother. Mary, the sinless Mother, receiving the washing of Baptism, would parallel Jesus, the All-Holy One, consenting to receive John's 'baptism of repentance', and 'being numbered with sinners'.

But in any case, we know of course from the dogma of the Immaculate Conception that from the first beginning of Mary's existence, she was already preserved free from original sin, in virtue of the foreseen merits of her Son – the most perfectly redeemed of all disciples. At the heart of original sin is the deprivation of sanctifying grace, resulting from the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve. So conversely, Mary, by reason of the merits of her Son, had sanctifying grace from the first moment of her conception: she was full of grace, and in relationship with the Holy Trinity, from the start of her existence. So in that aspect at least, it is as though she was 'baptised' from that first moment.

The purpose and effect of the Sacrament of Baptism is indeed to bring *us* into this life of the Trinity – making us adopted children of God the Father, sharing in the divine nature; members of Christ the eternal Son, imprinted with the sign of his Death and Resurrection; and Temples of the Holy Spirit, who brings us sanctifying grace, the seed of life in heaven.

The Second Vatican Council spoke of Mary's relationship with each of the persons in the Blessed Trinity. In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, the Council teaches: 'Redeemed by reason of the merits of her Son and united to Him by a close and indissoluble tie, she is endowed with the high office and dignity of being the Mother of the Son of God, by which account she is also the beloved daughter of the Father and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Because of this gift of sublime grace she far surpasses all creatures, both in heaven and on earth.' (53) So our own baptismal relationship with the Holy Trinity is reflective of Mary's pre-eminent relationship with the Trinity, and her living of the Trinitarian life.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* also speaks of the virtues and gifts that flow from baptism. We read (n. 1266):

'The Most Holy Trinity gives the baptised sanctifying grace, the grace of justification:

- enabling them to believe in God, to hope in him, and to love him through the theological virtues;
- giving them the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through the gifts of the Holy Spirit;
- allowing them to grow in goodness through the moral virtues.

Thus the whole organism of the Christian's supernatural life has its roots in Baptism.'

So Mary, receiving this sanctifying grace of justification at the moment of her Immaculate Conception, is the model disciple for all of us in respect of all these virtues as well – of faith, hope and charity; of all the moral virtues, governed by the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance; and the Holy Spirit's gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord.

On this Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, may our Blessed Mother intercede for us, that we may truly live out our own baptismal grace after her perfect example, and being fully conformed to Mary, being thereby most fully conformed to Jesus.