

**Feast of the Baptism of the Lord
Closing Mass for Life Awareness Retreat**

On this last day of the Christmas season, we celebrate our Lord's baptism by John in the Jordan River. This event in his life marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in the world. After his baptism Jesus begins his life of service, teaching, preaching, and healing. The beautiful miracle that occurred as our Lord came up out of the water enabled Jesus to follow the way that had been marked out for him in his life as the Savior.

The Lord submitted himself to baptism to fulfill all righteousness. Jesus did not did to be cleansed by the waters of baptism, but he entered the waters anyway so he could initiate the new covenant in himself. As he came out of the water, the skies opened, and the voice of the Father was heard. What beautiful words the Father spoke to his Son, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Lk). The Father made his love for the Son known to the world, but also called his Son to his purpose. The voice of the Father called Jesus to his purpose in life, to that for which he was born into this world. The Father called his Son to his *vocation*.

The Father has called us into covenant with him through the baptism initiated by Christ. When we emerge from the water we belong to the Father, he speaks to us as he spoke to his Son, Jesus: "You are my beloved children; in you I am well pleased." How great a blessing is it that we are now called the daughters and sons of God! But now my friends, just as Jesus was called to his vocation by the Father at his baptism, so are we. Each of us is baptized not only into the family of God, but into a vocation in our lives. Each of us has been called by the Father to a purpose in this life and are sent forth to fulfill this purpose for the good of the Kingdom.

However, we do not go alone. At our Lord's baptism the Holy Spirit came to him and rested upon him. The Spirit empowered Jesus for his vocation. The Spirit is the fire that shines within us as we live out the vocation God has given us. We draw our strength from the Spirit as we follow the call of the Father, just as our Lord did in his life.

During this Life Awareness Weekend, you have been reflecting on the calling you have heard through the power of the Holy Spirit. God calls priests sanctify the world through the sacraments, acting in the person of Christ, the head of the Church. Consecrated religious sisters and brothers challenge the people of God to live virtuous lives through their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience; they help remind us that there is a deeper reality to life.

These vocations are not easy vocations, but there are many called by the Father to live them out. To you who hear the call, I say, do not be afraid. The Holy Spirit lives in you, by virtue of your baptism. Because of this you have what you need to answer the call of the Father with courage and joy.

Maybe the skies did not open up on the day of your baptism as they did at the Baptism of the Lord, but you heaven did bend down to meet you. We have become the daughters and sons of the Father, heirs to the life of the Son, and temples of the Holy Spirit that fires the life of our vocation. Trust in the Lord always, and rejoice that you have been called for a purpose and sent out to help build the Kingdom of God. Remember the words of the Father today: "You are my beloved; in you I am well pleased."