

## Baptized with the Holy Spirit

Billy Graham was returning from Charlotte where he was where he had a speaking engagement. When his plane arrived, a limo was waiting to pick him up and take him home. He stopped and spoke to the driver and he said, "You know what? I am 87 years old and I have never, ever in my life driven a limo. Will you give me a chance to drive this limo? I've never done this before." The driver said, "No problem. Go ahead and get behind the wheel and we will just be on our way."

Well Billy got into the driver seat and they headed off. A short distance down the highway, a rookie state trooper had set up his first speed trap. The block long, black limo passed them going 70 mph in a 55-mounted per hour zone. The trooper pulled out and easily caught the limo and pulled it over. When he walked up to the driver's door, he was surprised to see who was driving. Immediately he excused himself and he called his supervisor. He said, "You know, I know we're supposed to enforce the law, but I also know that we're supposed to give courtesies to people that are in powerful places; important people". Well the supervisor agreed and he said, "Is that the governor?" "No. He's more important than that." The supervisor responded, "Is he the president of the United States? The rookie cop said, "No, he's even more important than that". The Super finally asked woman, "Well who is it? The young trooper replied, "I think it's Jesus because he has Billy Graham as a chauffeur!"

### Important People are Part of our World

That rookie cop might be a rookie for a long time, yes I can say, but you know important people are part of our world aren't they? Billy Graham, T.D. Jakes so many other spiritual people who powerfully touched our lives; there are presidents and other world leaders: Andrew Bochelli and Celine Dion are great singers and the thing about these important people is that we remember them don't we? They could be gone for a long time, but in a way they will still affect many, many lives. In fact, because of their importance and their influence they actually affect the lives of many people throughout time. Important people are part of our world and in a very real way, by God's grace; they have influence in our lives, hopefully for the better. Today we reflect on a very important person in the Scriptures and that would be John the Baptist.

### **"I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8)**

John the Baptist had an incredible ministry during his life that profoundly touched the nation of Israel and continues to touch your life and my life to this day. He was anointed by God, even before his birth. You remember the story about John and Jesus and the timing of the birth. From the very beginning, it was known that this child was anointed by God for a very special ministry. In fact, John's ministries we read today and the Scriptures was to call the people of Israel to repentance for their sins. The way that they were to manifest that repentance was to come and to be baptized by him in the river Jordan as a physical sign before God and before all the people of Israel that they were honoring the call of God to them in that moment in the repentance of their sin. It was prophesied in Isaiah about him that he would be a voice crying in the wilderness to the people of Israel to repent. It says that he wore garments of camel hair, ate locust and wild honey; he was organic in the fullest sense of the word. He was out in the desert; he was a prophet; he was different from the people. The people honored him because they saw the anointing of God upon him; life they felt the anointing of his words as he spoke. The spirit of God drew them as God honored the ministry of John the Baptist during his time among the people of Israel.

John proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand in that moment. One of the things that is important for you and I to realize is that somebody who is been called by God be they a prophet or a pastor or other some kind of spiritual leader; there will be a sense in which they will proclaim God's timeless word. You know this book the Bible, is full of God's truths and promises to all of us. There is a sense in which much of this book is full of truths that are timeless. Then there will be times where the word that is proclaimed is especially true for this moment. That's what John was doing. John said to the people of Israel, "The kingdom of God is at hand; right now. Not when you die. Not when you eventually go to heaven. The kingdom of God is at hand right now for you. And it is time for you to respond right now."

You know so often in our lives we might plan things. We might put things off. We might like a little bit of time to think about things and ruminate about them. What John was saying to the people of Israel, and what John is saying to you and me right now, is that there are times when the kingdom of heaven is breaking into our reality right now. It demands a response for the people of Israel that went out to be baptized in the river Jordan and repent of their sins. They were saying, "Yes" to the kingdom of heaven in that moment. They were saying "Yes" to the Holy Spirit in that moment. They were saying "Yes" to God in that moment. And to the people of Israel that did not go, they were saying "No".

So again, we need to hear the words of John we need to hear the words of spiritual leaders that God puts in our midst when they were proclaiming the timeless truths of God. Also when they are saying to us, "It is time for you to respond now", it is very important to distinguish that. Another thing about John was that he was a prophet. He proclaimed that God loved people. He proclaimed that God wanted us to come and; repent before him; to be baptized and be reconciled with God. That is what he proclaimed to the people of Israel. He also said some hard things. You will notice that in John's ministry, he actually rebuked King Herod, of all people, for his incestuous marriage that occurred. In fact, King Herod at the time was troubled by this. He ended up imprisoning John for this challenge to his authority. He was struggling with John because he also knew that there was something spiritual and special about him. The reality is though is that ultimately this would cost John his head because Herod's wife was so offended by it.

So important take away for you and I as we hear the prophets of God in the Old Testament, and new as we hear them even in this day and spiritual leaders in our midst. Beloved, there will be times where they will share things with you that you'll just love. You just cannot get enough of it. You'll just think over and over it and it'll just warm your soul and you'll treasure it. Then there are going to be times that they are going to say something to you that you just don't like. It might be a rebuke. It might be a challenge. They might say to you, and then may not be... they might not even realize they are challenging you. That is just God's spirit speaking through them. What that's important for you and I to realize is that we need to listen to the full counsel of God. God loves us enough that He encourages us, has mercy upon us, and draws us to himself. He also loves us enough to tell us the truth about ourselves. Sometimes that is a difficult thing to hear, but it is important to hear and it is for our edification ultimately. It is for our spiritual growth and that we might become even closer to our Lord.

There is something else that John said in the Scripture here today and that was he said that there were someone coming who is going to be greater than him. That is a pretty amazing thing. Here is a prophet that was prophesied about by Isaiah in the Old Testament. Here was the embodiment of somebody who is a fulfillment of the word of the Lord and he was all about it. Let me tell ya; the ministry, was happening people were getting touched by the Spirit of God, they were repenting, they were coming by the thousands! He was in the midst of a great outpouring and move of God! Awesome thing to be a part of. Yet he said in that moment that there was someone coming who is greater than

he. In fact this person was so much greater than John that he was not even worthy to take the sandals off of this person's foot, which in that day, when you think about the culture, what John is saying, is that he wasn't even worthy to welcome him; that's how incredible and mighty and anointed this person was who is coming in. That person is Jesus Christ. He says, **"I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."**

And so again during the season of Advent, we have this reading as we're waiting for the coming of Jesus, we have this reading that is giving us a picture of our Lord. We have this reading and this prophecy that is speaking to us about what Jesus's ministry is going to be about. We would all affirm as we walk into this church that one of the main things that we see at the center of this church, up behind the altar, is what? We see is a cross with nails. The reason why we see the cross is this is the central work of Jesus Christ. That he suffered and died on the cross for our sins. That as many as would receive him would be able to enter into the kingdom of heaven and enjoy eternity, we would affirm that. Did you also realize, based on the words of John the Baptist today, **"Jesus will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."** I cannot tell you how much of my life, has been spent listening to people argue about the Holy Spirit. I just want to put to rest the arguments today and simply say to you based on the words of John that part of Jesus' ministry, this is part of what Jesus was going to do, was to baptize you and me in the Holy Spirit. Now people will say, "Well Father Joe, that was really only meant for Jesus's time. "You know what, that was only for the apostles. It is not for us." I will simply say to you that it is false teaching. Jesus' ministry is timeless. That his ministry of filling you and me with the Holy Spirit is as timeless as His ministry from the cross saving all of mankind.

It's important that we hear that today in a powerful and deep way. The pulpit commentary shares is as that John is saying Christ will pour his Holy Spirit so abundantly upon you that he will cleanse you from all your sins and fill you with holiness love and all his excellent graces. He did this visibly on Pentecost and does so invisibly through the sacrament of baptism and confirmation in which Christ baptizes the soul. So get this picture with me of what happens. Jesus goes to John to receive the baptism. Is baptized in the water and John recognizes who Jesus is. You remember the story and John says to Jesus, "What are you doing? I should not be baptizing you. I know who you are! I should not be doing this." Jesus says, "This should be done for the fulfillment of all Scripture." As soon as Jesus is baptized under the waters of the River Jordan, He comes up and there is that the Dove over him, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. So one of the first things that happens as Jesus begins his ministry is that Jesus is baptized in the Holy Spirit. He's filled with the Holy Spirit as he begins his ministry. The Holy Spirit drives him out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil for 40 days and 40 nights. Hear this; Jesus' spirituality is rooted in his relationship with his Heavenly Father and the person of the Holy Spirit. As Jesus baptizes you and me in the Holy Spirit as we are open to the fullness of the gifts that are ours in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation and truly walk in them, we are in a very real way participating in the Trinity of God. Think about that for a moment... if you and I are living in relationship to the Holy Spirit who are we a part of? We are part of the Trinity of God. God is using us and is filling us and anointing us to do the work that He is given to do for his kingdom here

I want to affirm before you here today is that John the Baptist is a very important person. I want to say before all of you here today, I am grateful for the relationship that each of you have with the Holy Spirit, wherever that might be right now, because of the sacrament of baptism and confirmation. I also am here to say to you here today, that I believe the Holy Spirit desires even more intimate relationship with each one of us. There are some Christians I would say, who have a degree of relationship with Jesus Christ. There is a sense that they pray to him and ask him for his forgiveness and for him to move in their lives and to guide and direct them, but rarely if ever mention the Holy Spirit.

So I would just ask you here today to what extent do you really name and honor and experience a real and living relationship with the Holy Spirit? I do not say this here today to make you feel bad or condemn you, but I do want to raise this very important question. You only have a relationship with somebody who you are relating to. Think about it for a moment. You only have a relationship with somebody who you are relating to. If you are not relating to somebody, guess what? You really don't have a relationship with them or at best it might just be an acquaintance of some sort. I would say to you here today, I believe a lot of Christians have an acquaintance relationship with the Holy Spirit but not a real relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Let me share with you briefly in closing, what it looks like for me in my daily life. As soon as my feet hit the ground in the morning, one of the first things I'm doing early in that morning is I'm inviting the Holy Spirit to fill me fresh. There is a reason why I'm doing that. It's because I need that. I would not get through my day without the power in the presence of the Holy Spirit. I want to encourage you to think about your life like a colander if you will. You know the colander you put your spaghetti in and it has holes in it and all the water drains out. What you have left is some great pasta you're about to eat, right! That's what it's all about. You know what? Our lives are like that colander, that sieve. As you and I go through our life and live through our day, by the grace of God, the Holy Spirit's power and presence and anointing should be flowing through us, reaching out and touching other people and ministering to them and loving them and praying for them and being used to heal them. Throughout my day, I might ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom as I am meeting with somebody, maybe in the hospital room. Holy Spirit guide and lead us in our prayer time together here and in the Holy Spirit does. Or maybe somebody's upset and angry with me and things are quite working out and we might pray together, "Holy Spirit, help us. We need your divine help." Or the grace of being able to have power and anointing as you're moving through your life and needing the Spirit's wisdom about the next step you need to take.

Thank God that Jesus baptizes us with the Holy Spirit because we need the Holy Spirit in order to lead the Christian life that God is calling us to live. Welcome afresh the presence and anointing in your life of the Holy Spirit. No longer think of all the reasons why I can't do this. To begin to step out in faith and to surrender. To be open to the anointing and the presence of the Spirit that Jesus wants to give us. That you and I might be empowered, enabled and filled with joy and hope and grace to live the life that he is calling us to live. If you've ever felt like, "Jesus, I can't do this this, it is too hard for me to follow, I don't want to get out of bed this morning, I don't have enough faith to do this, it's too big for me",..Welcome the presence, power and embrace of the Blessed Holy Spirit in your life. Thank God!

*Fr. Joe Maiocco*