



symbolized turning over a new leaf in their lives and leaving sin behind. Jesus, although like us in every way, was without sin, as the Letter to the Hebrews assures us (Heb 4:15). That explains why John the Baptist objected to Jesus' request for baptism in the Gospel of Matthew, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?" (Matt 3:14). The answer Jesus gave John helps us to understand why Jesus wanted to be baptized, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." (Matt 3:15) "To fulfill all righteousness" is why Jesus wanted to be baptized. We might say it is difficult to understand this answer because Jesus was not lacking in righteousness and was already righteous. So how could his baptism fulfill all righteousness? (I will draw on Pope Benedict's book Jesus of Nazareth pp 17-23 to help us to answer this question.) Sinless Jesus did not have any sins of his own, therefore it could only have been our sins that he took down into the river Jordan. Naturally no one would understand this at that time but they would realize this later when they understood that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. So Jesus' baptism in the Jordan and his dying on the cross go together; he did both for our sins. He took our sins on his shoulders as he went down into the Jordan and as he died on the cross.

I think we can see this close connection between Jesus' baptism and his cross in the Scriptures:

1. The prophet Isaiah prophesied that a servant would suffer because of our sins (Isa 52:13-53:12). You are familiar with this prophecy of Isaiah from hearing it every year on Good Friday. This servant would be righteous and by his suffering would make sinners righteous. We obviously see this prophecy predicting Jesus' Passion.

2. Jesus, when speaking in prophecy about his Passion, described it as a baptism. "There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:50) When James and John wanted to sit in glory beside Jesus he spoke about his Passion to them but we can be sure that they understand only later. Jesus said, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (Mark 10:38)

3. The Gospel of John tells us that when John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching him in the river Jordan he proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) It is interesting that as Jesus appears at the river Jordan, John the Baptist mentions that Jesus takes away the sin of the world. It is also interesting that John the Baptist describes Jesus as the Lamb of God. In the Gospel of John Jesus dies on the cross as the Passover lambs are being slaughtered in the temple. The Passover lambs were slaughtered in remembrance of the first

Passover lambs whose blood was smeared on the doorposts the last night the Hebrews spent in Egypt to protect them from death. Jesus is the new Passover Lamb of the New Covenant who shed his blood for us to save us from our sins, and already at his baptism he is proclaimed by John to be the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

On the cross Jesus took our sins on himself and made us righteous. When Jesus was baptized he was looking forward to taking our sins on himself on the cross. So when Jesus was baptized he was already taking our guilt down into the river Jordan. In this way we can see that when Jesus was baptized all righteousness was fulfilled. When Jonah was thrown overboard the ship, the life of everyone else on the ship was spared (Jon 1:12-15) and when Jesus took our sins and unrighteousness on his shoulders, we were saved and this begins with his baptism in the Jordan. So when Jesus is baptized he is already accepting his Passion and death.

Just as there is a close link between Jesus' baptism and his cross there is a close link between our baptism and Jesus' cross. Paul in his letter to the Romans tells us,

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:3-4)*

Paul is saying that when we were baptized we spiritually entered the tomb with Jesus to leave a life of sin behind. When we were baptized we buried sin by spiritually entering the tomb with Jesus and we rose again with the new life of Jesus just as Jesus rose to new life out of the tomb. Our baptism, just like the other six sacraments, receives its power from Jesus' death and resurrection. Our baptism is a sharing in the effects and salvation of Jesus' death and resurrection, a sharing in the new life of Jesus we receive from his death and resurrection.

Jesus' baptism in the Jordan expressed the intention of his whole life right up to dying on the cross for us, taking our sins on himself to save us. Our baptism also expresses the intention of our whole life up to our death, leaving our sin behind and living with the life of Jesus. Every day is to be a living out of our baptism with that new life of Jesus. Every day is another opportunity to turn from sin and continue following Jesus which we began with our baptism. When we were baptized, we entered the tomb with Jesus to leave a life of sin behind. Our baptism receives its power from Jesus' death and resurrection. Our baptism is a sharing in the effects and salvation of Jesus' death and resurrection, a sharing in the new life of Jesus.