

Statement for Website
From Fr. Michael

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Writings: Baptismal Identity

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan (Mark 1:9).

When I was six days old, I was baptized at Holy Cross Parish in Oshawa, Ontario. It was at that moment I assumed my identity as a Roman Catholic. Since that time, I have tried to live out and better understand what that identity means. When I was young, my parents took me to Mass every Sunday. We ate fish instead of meat for supper on Fridays. I went to Holy Cross and John F. Kennedy Elementary Schools instead of the public school near our house. At university, I lived at the Newman Center at the edge of the campus of Queen's University for two years. As time passed, I became more conscious of how my baptismal identity has made me similar to but also different from other people.

In today's Gospel, Mark tells the story of how Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. Since this event is recorded in three of the Gospels, it is highly likely to have happened. Yet, it raises an awkward question. If John's Baptism was a sign of conversion from sin, why did Jesus, who presumably as Son of God had no sin, receive it. In response to this dilemma, Matthew's version of the story includes the conversation where John tries to dissuade Jesus from undergoing it. Perhaps Mark was indicating Baptism involved more than just being cleansed from sin and included the taking on of a new identity. Jesus was about to start his earthly ministry. His Baptism revealed that while he had not sinned, he would assume all the burdens of the human condition including the effects of sin, like pain, suffering and death. His Baptismal identity would reveal how he was similar to all people who had the same experiences but was different in that he was able to offer them as a means overcome the power of sin.

As each of us continues on our faith journey, we pick up new dimensions of our identity. We are more similar to each other than we think. None of us lives in a bubble safely isolated from what is going on around us. We are all fragile and vulnerable. Our lives could be changed fundamentally in a matter of hours. Death may not be an event which will take place in the far future.

Yet, how we respond to our experiences will likely make us different from others. My Baptismal identity reminds me that like Jesus I have to take on the effects of my sins which I am able to offer to God and trust that somehow, they are part of his plan.