

## First Sunday of the Year (Baptism of the Lord)

### “The Good News of ...”

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Luke 3:15-16, 21-22; Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Acts 10:34-38

**A**t the house of Cornelius Peter faced the challenge of explaining Christianity in one talk to a group of Romans who knew nothing about the Old Testament or the New. How did he begin? How would you?

The first phrase which came to Peter’s lips was “the good news of peace.” This is the exact phrase Paul uses to the Ephesians: “Jesus came and announced the good news of peace to you who were far off and to those who were near.” His standard greeting was “grace and peace to you.” To the Apostles, Jesus meant peace: peace within themselves, peace with other people, peace with God (see Ephesians 2:1-22).

This peace is a special work of God, but we have to dispose ourselves for it. Paul says, “Rejoice in the Lord... dismiss all anxiety from your minds.... Present your needs to God in prayer.... Then God’s own peace, which goes beyond all understanding, will stand watch over your hearts and minds.” (Philippians 4:4-7).

Alienation disturbs our peace. We are deeply uneasy if we do not feel we “belong,” are accepted, are loved, are in relationship, or have secure bonds with anybody. We cannot ignore, without psychological denial, our need for relationship with other people. And we cannot ignore forever our need for relationship with God. According to the Apostles, Jesus answered both of these needs by calling us into the community of the Church.

This community is a community of witnesses (Acts 10:39). We bear witness to each other about the reality of Jesus Christ, about what we have “seen and heard and felt.” Out of this comes *koinonia*—community, communion, fellowship, close relationship—both with each other and with

God (cf. 1 John 1:1-4). We do this by sharing faith with each other in communal worship. At Mass, for example, we celebrate together our common possession of and enlightenment by the word of God (Liturgy of the Word); we express our common commitment to living and offering ourselves as the Body of Christ for the life of the world—in union with Jesus who offered and offers himself for us (Liturgy of the Eucharist); we dramatize and experience our communion with one another and with God in the Sign of Peace and in receiving together the Body and Blood of Christ (Communion Service). All of these are acts that witness to the reality of Jesus Christ in our lives, and to our own grasp and experience of his Good News. They unite and strengthen us in faith.

When we have the clarity and the courage to speak the truth to one another about values—about business decisions, management policies, civic concerns, our social behavior, our prejudices, the challenge that the Good News of Jesus Christ is to the cultural assumptions of our peer group—then our lives bear witness to the present reality of what Peter said about Jesus: that “God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and power.” If that Spirit and power are visibly acting in us, then Jesus is still visibly present in our world. Then we are Good News. That is what it means to be “witnesses.”

Jesus went about “doing good works and healing all who were in the grip of the devil.” He still does in us, if we choose to make this our concern. If we consciously go about our business looking for chances to help others—with a word, a smile, a gesture of courtesy—then we will have a healing effect all day long on all who are in the grip of sadness, affliction, alienation, prejudice or anything else that is the cumulative result of sins committed in our world. If we do this for everyone without distinction people will see what Peter saw: “How true it is that God shows no partiality.”

Peter’s sentence ends: “And God was with him.” We constantly ask for each other, “God be with you—that you might continue the presence and mission of Jesus on earth.”

## Reflecting on This Week's Gospels

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### First Week of the Year

*Pray daily: Lord, by accepting baptism like everyone else, you showed your desire to be identified with us, even in our sinfulness and need. Teach me to be one with you in your saving love for every person and nation in the world. Amen.*

**Monday: Mark 1:14-20:** Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the Good News of God and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the Good News.” Is the Gospel still news to you? Good news? What changes have you made in your life recently which show that you are still responding to the Good News?

**Tuesday: Mark 1:21-28:** The people were astounded at Jesus’ teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. What “astounds” you today in Jesus’ teaching? As you grow and mature, does his teaching impress you more and more? Why?

**Wednesday: Mark 1:29-39:** When it was evening, after sunset, they brought to Jesus all who were ill or possessed by demons. The whole town was gathered at the door. Whom have you brought to Jesus to be healed of something? To find answers or comfort? To experience his action in the life of the Church today?

**Thursday: Mark 1:40-45:** Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched the leper, and said to him, “I do choose. Be made clean!” Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean. How has Jesus touched you in your life? How has he healed you? Of what?

**Friday: Mark 2:1-12:** Jesus asked, “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Stand up and take your mat and walk’?” When you go to Jesus in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, do you just ask him for

forgiveness, or do you ask for the grace to ‘stand up and walk’ in the way of God?

**Saturday: Mark 2:13-17:** Jesus said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.” In which category do you see yourself? How much need of Jesus do you think you have from day to day? What help do you seek from him? When do you seek it? How? How often?

### **Living This Week’s Gospels**

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**As Christian:** Hear God the Father saying about each person you meet during the day, “This is my beloved son,” or “my beloved daughter.” Act accordingly.

**As Disciple:** The National Conference of Catholic Bishops’ pastoral letter, “The Challenge of Peace” (May 3, 1983), said, “We urge every diocese and parish to implement balanced and objective educational programs to help people at all age levels to better understand the issues of war and peace. Development and implementation of such programs must receive a high priority during the next several years.” Call the diocesan office (or your parish) to ask what is being done that is available to you.

**As Prophet:** Notice how often people are spoken about or treated as “them” in distinction to “us.” Make a point of speaking about every person, nation, race, religion, sex and social class in a way that shows you identify with them as called into oneness by Christ.

**As Priest:** Reach out to someone you don’t know or don’t feel bonded with by culture. Make some positive gesture of recognition, acceptance or appreciation.

**As King:** Expand your concern to embrace in some concrete way the needs of some category of people for whose welfare

you don't ordinarily take responsibility—for example, a different level of employees where you work or people of a different culture, social class or another country.

## Second Sunday of the Year

# Jesus: The Way to Grow

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John 2:1-11; Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Jesus changed 130 gallons of water into wine at Cana—a little country wedding where there probably weren't more than a hundred people. Can you imagine what this did to that party? In Cana they are still talking about it!

The Gospel tells us that after this miracle Jesus' disciples "believed in him." Since they were disciples, they already believed in him. But this miracle showed them the scope of what Jesus came to do: he came to transform human life on this earth the way 130 gallons of wine transform a tiny country wedding.

At Cana Jesus showed what his mission was all about. Two clues tell us this. First, he addressed his mother as "woman," seeing her, not just as Mary his mother, but as the woman, the Daughter of Sion, the Spouse of God, the symbol of his People, his Church. He didn't just hear Mary asking about wine at a wedding; he saw the human race asking for the true "wine of the wedding feast," the coming of the reign of God.

That explains his answer: "My hour has not yet come." In John's Gospel the "hour" of Jesus is always the moment of his crucifixion and Resurrection, his defeat and his triumph. It is the moment when Jesus pours out his blood, the true wine of the wedding feast, to inebriate the world. And Jesus, speaking to his mother, is in fact telling his people it is not yet time for him to pour out his blood.

The challenge of this Gospel is to accept the scope of what Jesus wants to do in our lives. He did not come just to lift up our behavior a little bit, or just to heal the wounds of sin. He came to transform human life entirely, to make it divine. The Jesus we believe in is not just a healer or prophet or teacher. He is God sharing the life of God with us.

The conversion to which we are called is not just a conversion from sin to good behavior. The transformation offered us is not just from defective human being to healed human being. No, we are offered the transformation of grace: the transformation from merely human life to a sharing in the life of God himself. We are the water Jesus wishes to change into wine. He wants to make the world drunk with joy.

In action, the life of God in us takes the form of lived faith, active hope, divine love. Whatever lifts us up to a higher level of faith, hope and love increases our sharing in the life of God and makes us more divine. And anything that holds us down on a merely human level of thinking, acting or loving holds us back from living the life of grace in its fullness. That is where the paradox of pain comes in.

Jesus turned water into wine; then later turned wine into his blood. Wine, the symbol of joy, becomes blood, the symbol of pain. Yet his blood is joy. Through Christ's blood we find joy. Through his death we find life. And when Jesus poured out his blood on the cross, he poured out the wine of the wedding feast. The paradox is life through death, joy through pain, wine becoming blood, blood becoming wine, and joy and pain becoming indistinguishable in the ecstasy of love.

Jesus is not a Savior who saves us from pain, any more than loving saves us from pain. In fact, Jesus often saves us through pain: ours as well as his. Anyone who has experienced love growing through pain can understand this.

The greatest pain of Christian living is the pain of going beyond ourselves, beyond our human level, to live by pure faith, pure hope, pure love—to live on the level of God. But without this pain of change and self-transcendence, we can never really know what it is to live the life of grace.

## Reflecting on This Week's Gospels

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### Second Week of the Year

*Pray daily: Lord, you came to transform life like one hundred and thirty gallons of wine transformed the wedding feast at Cana. Excite my mind and my heart. Fill me. Amen.*

**Monday: Mark 2:18-22:** “New wine is poured into fresh wineskins.” How has your faith changed, not only your behavior, but your goals in life and basic values?

**Tuesday: Mark 2:23-28:** “The sabbath was made for people, not people for the sabbath.” How does the Sunday Eucharist serve the human race? How does your participation help you? Help others?

**Wednesday: Mark 3:1-6:** Jesus said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out and his hand was restored. When, how has Jesus said to you, “Stretch out your heart”? What have you found excitingly challenging in the Gospel?

**Thursday: Mark 3:7-12:** “He had cured many and, as a result, those who had diseases were pressing upon him to touch him.” What is the difference between going to Jesus for healing and going because you want to grow in understanding what he teaches? When do you do each? Which do you do more?

**Friday: Mark 3:13-19:** “He appointed twelve that they might be with him and he might send them forth to preach.” Why did the apostles have to “be with” Jesus before he could send them out to preach? How can you be with him in the same way? What is available in your parish?

**Saturday: Mark 3:20-21:** The crowd gathered, making it impossible for them even to eat. When his relatives heard of this they set out to seize him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.” Why would Jesus’ relatives have thought this? How

was he acting? Has anyone ever thought this of you for the same reason?

## **Living This Week's Gospels**

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**As Christian:** Each day examine the goal you pursue in one area of your life—social, family, school, work, civic—asking how the “new wine” did or could transform it.

**As Disciple:** Each day read one of these texts, asking how this can be your goal in life: John 10:10; Ephesians 1:3-10; Ephesians 2:15-22; Ephesians 4:1-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20.

**As Prophet:** Do one thing each day that visibly expresses a goal in your family or social life, school or work that is different from the goals our culture holds up to us.

**As Priest:** Talk to one friend, co-worker or fellow student each day, asking what is the real goal of what you do together.

**As King:** Select one area of your life (family, work, school, social, civic). Write down the Christian goal you pursue through it. Then examine how each policy or practice in that area does or does not contribute to that goal. See what you can change.