

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Banish Fear of Fire**    The Baptism of the Lord    Monday, January 9, 2017    8:15 AM  
Acts 10:34-38;    **Mt 3:13-17**    (It is up to us to bring together the experience of God with the gift of God.)

As I mentioned on Saturday, there are **three epiphanies in the New Testament**; at least as the Fathers of the Church collated these ideas and basically thought about them and talked about them, there were three. The first is this one because it starts from the Gospel of Mark, and that's how Mark begins the gospel with **the baptism of Jesus**, the epiphany of the Holy Spirit coming down peacefully and hovering and the voice of the Father affirming Jesus as "my beloved Son."

John's Gospel, in contrast, begins Jesus' ministry with **Cana**, again involving water, water transformed into wine, an indication of the ministry of transformation and the suffering Jesus will endure. And then of course Matthew brings his own special perspective of **Jesus as a child drawing gentiles from afar**. This of course actually only happened much later, but it's already there in story form, prophesying you may say how Jesus' ministry will develop.

Today we could focus on this idea of baptism because **we also begin our life in Christ in Baptism**, and also in Baptism we receive the Holy Spirit, although often not as an epiphany; that is, **we don't experience the Holy Spirit in our Baptism**. The sign is there. The meaning is there. The grace is there, but we are not there. And so our entire lives can be spent in this sort of vacuum, where we are not there with the Spirit, with the grace, with the sign. And **it is up to us** to make up this difference somehow, **to bring together the experience of God with the gift of God**.

There is, after all, just so much God can do. The whole mystery of the incarnation is that God is the self-giving beginning of all that is, the self-giving Creator and redeemer and Savior and blesser and healer and on and on, but we see a world that is not so saved, not so healed, not so redeemed, not so blessed. Why? Because we haven't contacted. **We haven't put ourselves into the gift consciously, intentionally deliberately. This is our work. No one can do it for us.** Parents cannot do it for their children. Spouses can't do it for each other. Priests obviously can't do it for their parishioners. **We all have to do our own work of making alive the gift of the Spirit.** And that means **we have to banish from our hearts fear because, as John says, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire,"** and we know we are all afraid of fire. But **if we really want to taste the power of God, we have to banish from our hearts the fear of fire.**