



This weekend we close the Christmas Season with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. I think we all need to write to the Pope and get him to extend Christmas a little longer, don't you? [I'm kidding ... I think] In our Catechism we read that Jesus' baptism was "on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission as God's suffering Servant" (#536). Jesus was fully aware of the symbolic meaning of his own baptism: as He was willingly submerged in water, so one day he would willingly be submerged in suffering and death to atone

for our sins, and he would rise from the waters of death in His human body and thus bring new life, eternal life, to all who would listen to His voice and follow Him with gratitude, love, and devotion.

As we celebrate Jesus' baptism, we cannot help but remember the significance of our own baptism which is intimately associated with His. We learn from the Catechism:

Through Baptism the Christian is sacramentally assimilated to Jesus, who in his own baptism anticipates his death and resurrection. The Christian must enter into this mystery of humble self-abasement and repentance, go down into the water with Jesus in order to rise with him, be reborn of water and the Spirit so as to become the Father's beloved son in the Son and "walk in newness of life" (Rm 6:4). [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 537]

St. Paul in the Bible teaches:

"You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead." (Colossians 2:12, NAB)

"We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life." (Romans 6:4)

When we were baptized, we were literally touched by God and received an indelible mark upon our souls: we died with Christ and rose with Him; we were reborn into the life of God. What does this mean? Simply put, only by living for and with Christ can we find true peace, joy, love, and fulfillment. We have been ordained, ordered, to God; we have been inaugurated into the ultimate mission: to live in a loving union with the one true God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We have been predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus (Rm 8:29). Our success, our fulfillment, as human beings will be measured by the degree of our union with God. St. Paul teaches us

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will, for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us in the beloved. ... For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them." (Ephesians 1:3–6; 2:10)

As we begin the new year, we pray for the grace to live faithfully the precious life of grace we have been given, and to know the joy and peace that only God can give. HAPPY NEW YEAR!!

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples



Saint Aelred of Rievaulx

Feast Day: January 12

Born: 1110

Died: January 12, 1167

Saint Aelred was born in Hexham, Northumberland, to a noble family. He received his education at Roxburgh, demonstrating exceptional intellectual talents. By age 24 he had served in the court of King David I of Scotland, rising to the position of Master of the Household; however, Saint Aelred felt a calling to monastic life, leading him to leave his courtly position and join the Cistercian community at Rievaulx Abbey in Yorkshire. At age 32 Saint Aelred was chosen as an emissary to Rome, representing northern prelates in a dispute and upon his return, he was appointed as the novice master at Rievaulx. A year later he became abbot of the newly established Revesby Abbey in Lincolnshire and within four years was elected abbot of Rievaulx Abbey, a position he held until his death.

Saint Aelred experienced a spiritual “conversion” upon entering monastic life, which led him to reevaluate his understanding of friendship. Saint Aelred’s concept of spiritual friendship represented a significant departure from traditional views of friendship in the Middle Ages in several key ways. He viewed friendship as a means to experience divine love. He famously wrote, “God is friendship...He who abides in friendship abides in God, and God in him.” He saw friendship as a path to spiritual growth and closeness to God. Saint Aelred distinguished spiritual friendship from the broader concept of Christian charity. While charity was to be extended to all, including enemies, spiritual friendship involved a deeper, more intimate connection between individuals who shared “agreement in things human and divine”. He grounded his concept of friendship in biblical examples, particularly the relationships between Jesus and his beloved disciple, and between Jonathan and David. This approach gave spiritual friendship a theological legitimacy that set it apart from secular notions of friendship. In essence, Saint Aelred’s concept of spiritual friendship transformed the medieval understanding of friendship from a primarily social or utilitarian relationship into a sacred bond that could lead individuals closer to God and to each other in profound ways.

Saint Aelred was not only an able administrator but also a prolific writer. Among his most famous writings is “Spiritual Friendship”. He governed 150 choir monks and 500 lay brothers at the Cistercian abbey at Rievaulx. He ruled firmly, but with kindness. In two decades of service at the abbey, he did not dismiss even one person from the monastery. Although constantly suffering from kidney stones, Saint Aelred visited many other abbeys, extending his gentle influence throughout western monasticism. For the last four years of his life, illness confined him to a cell attached to the abbey where small groups of monks daily sought his counsel.

Reflection: Authentic friendships can create a space for Christ’s presence, fostering spiritual growth and mutual support. Saint Aelred’s journey from royal courtier to influential abbot, his compassionate leadership, and his profound insights into human relationships and spirituality have left an enduring legacy. Saint Aelred’s emphasis on friendship as a path to divine love offers a timeless message, inviting us to see our friendships as opportunities for encountering Christ and growing in faith.