

Isaiah 43:1-7 and Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

Renewing Our Baptismal Commitment: A Call to Justice and the Poor

Introduction

The sound of rushing water captures our attention. It soothes and refreshes, yet its power can carve mountains and reshape the earth. For some, water is life; for others, it represents danger. But for us, as followers of Christ, water symbolizes something even deeper: our identity, our calling, and our redemption. Today, as we journey into the waters of baptism, we are reminded that this sacred act not only renews us as God's beloved children but also calls us to live out His justice, particularly through an option for the poor and marginalized.

Called by Name: The Dignity of the Forgotten

The people of Israel were far from home, living in exile. Stripped of their land, their temple, and even their dignity, they felt forgotten. Into this despair, Isaiah spoke words of profound hope: *"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine."*

These words were not just a comfort; they were a declaration of worth. God did not abandon Israel, even in their suffering. Instead, He reminded them of their value and promised His presence in the midst of their trials.

Like Israel, many today experience exile—not always physical, but social, economic, or spiritual exile. The poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed are often cast aside by society, yet baptism reminds us that God calls each person by name. His love and redemption are not reserved for the powerful but flow especially to the vulnerable.

As Gustavo Gutiérrez reminds us: *"The poor are the privileged recipients of God's love."* In baptism, we are not only reminded of our identity as God's beloved but are also challenged to recognize that identity in others, especially those whom the world overlooks.

The Revelation in the Waters: Justice through the Spirit

On the banks of the Jordan, people gathered around John the Baptist, seeking hope and direction. They wondered if he might be the Messiah. But John pointed them to someone greater—someone who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.

When Jesus stepped into the water, the heavens opened, and a voice declared: *"You are my beloved Son; with you, I am well pleased."* This moment revealed Jesus' identity and inaugurated His ministry, one that would focus on the poor, the outcast, and the sinner.

Jesus' baptism was not just about personal identity; it was a declaration of mission. To be beloved by God means to reflect that love in the world, particularly to those in need. In our baptism, we too are called to embrace this mission. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote: *"The*

call of Christ is a call to come and die.” It is a call to die to indifference and apathy, to allow the Spirit to work through us in transforming the world.

Renewing Our Commitment: Living the Option for the Poor

As we reflect on the waters of baptism, God invites us to renew our commitment not only to Him but to His work in the world. What does this look like in practice?

1. **Recognizing the Image of God in the Poor:** Isaiah reminds us that God redeems and calls us by name. This includes the poor, the oppressed, and the forgotten. To live our baptismal calling means seeing the dignity of every person and working to restore that dignity where it has been stripped away.
2. **Living as Agents of Justice:** Jesus’ ministry was marked by His care for the marginalized. He fed the hungry, healed the sick, and proclaimed good news to the poor. Our commitment to baptism calls us to do the same—to be a voice with many more that claim justice, even for the ones we think are "voiceless" when actually they have their own voices and to create systems that reflect God’s justice.
3. **Sharing God’s Glory:** Isaiah says we are created for God’s glory. This is not a passive statement but a challenge. We glorify God not by building monuments but by building communities of inclusion, compassion, and equity.

Conclusion: Baptism as a Call to Action

The waters of baptism are not still; they are alive, moving, and calling us forward. They remind us of who we are—beloved children of God—but they also challenge us to live as witnesses to His love, particularly among the poor and marginalized.

Just as water can shape the land, God’s Spirit within us can shape a world where the hungry are fed, the outcasts are welcomed, and the forgotten are remembered.

Today, as we hear God’s voice saying, “*You are mine,*” let us respond with lives that reflect His justice. Let us stand with the poor, walk alongside the suffering, and commit ourselves to a world that mirrors the Kingdom of God.

Amen.

Rev. Joel Rodríguez

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Hurricane Mitch, Tegucigalpa, Honduras 1998:



Hurricane Iota, La Lima, Honduras 2020:





Hurricane Eta, Depto de Cortez, Honduras 2020:



