

*"His pure love makes up for the sins of a world..."*

January 11, 2009 - Baptism of the Lord

One of the most enlightening things to do when pondering the Scriptures is to make connections regarding the use of symbols in the various parts of the Bible. For example, today as we read about the Baptism of Jesus, we are told that the Spirit came down from heaven in the form of a dove. That invites us to look at other passages where doves are mentioned.

One such incident would be in the story of Noah. When the ark landed on Mount Ararat, Noah was waiting for the flood waters to recede. He sent forth a raven, which flew back and forth because it could find no place to land. A week later he sent forth a dove that returned with an olive leaf in its beak, a sign that the waters were receding. The dove came to symbolize a new beginning.

In the Song of Songs, a beautiful celebration of romantic love as a symbol of God's love for Israel, the dove becomes a symbol of love and purity. This symbolism holds throughout the Old Testament, even to the point of being incorporated in temple sacrifice. If a person who wanted to offer a sin offering or an offering to be sacrificed in thanksgiving (as in the occasion of having a son circumcised) and could not afford the customary lamb or bullock, he could offer two turtledoves instead. The birds were affordable, but the important thing was that they were a symbol of pure love on the part of the person offering them.

The Spirit descending over the Jordan in the form of the dove carries the echoes of this symbolism. In this Jesus, there will be a new beginning of the covenant, a purification and renewal as in the days of Noah. The dove also represents pure love, demonstrated in Jesus' submission to His Father's will, and the Father's voice pronouncing Jesus His "beloved Son." Finally, the dove foreshadows the self-sacrifice of Jesus, as He offers Himself as the sin-offering for all of us. His pure love makes up for the sins of a world far too poor to merit forgiveness on our own.

Today we celebrate the beginning of a new age of grace, as the Beloved Son begins the public life and witness, and the suffering and death to self, that will lead to the resurrection, and that will bring us to salvation.

God bless you.

Fr. Pat