Reflection for 7th December (Advent 2)

Whether we were baptised as infants or as adults, the day of our baptism was an important one. Baptisms are a sign, not so much of our faith in God but of his faith in us, and through them we are given the promise of his grace throughout our lives. Perhaps some of the crowds of people who went out to be baptised by John in the river Jordan would look back on that day as see it as one that changed their lives.

On the day of our baptism, we cease to be part only of our domestic family and become part of Christ's worldwide family. Membership of the whole people of God is not optional – it is part of the meaning of the sacrament. We are baptised, not into the membership of a particular denomination, but into membership of the worldwide Church.

Our first reaction to spelling out the membership of the family to which we belong should really be one of gratitude - but it might be accompanied by a feeling of unease. After all, what do we have in common with some of these people in other lands, other cultures and other denominations, who worship and perhaps believe in ways which are very different from ours? Sometimes Christians in the same town seem to find it difficult to acknowledge one another, so how can we feel united with those we have never met? It is not always easy to feel a sense of belonging – and yet it is a fact that we are all members together of the body of Christ through baptism, wherever and whoever we are.

So we have a vision of our membership of the worldwide family of God, but our vision is tempered by the reality of the difficulty we experience of living together in peace and harmony.

As followers of Christ, we need to be renewed again and again in that vision, in our hope of the possibility of unity and peace, justice and cooperation in the world and above all within the family of the Church. We need such renewal to keep us hopeful, to nurture our faith and to keep us true to Christ. But as a matter of honesty, we also need to face up to the reality of conflict, division and injustice, so that we can confront the difficulties in the task of building peace and justice to which Christ's followers are called, through our baptism into his Church – something for which we should always give thanks to God.

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