

When January arrives, it is seen by many as the time to start fresh. The old year is in the past, and a new year is before us. If ever there was a time to start over, this is it. And so, resolutions are made to change habits and to renew relationships. There are some who are quite serious about making a new beginning.

What about you? Are you satisfied with everything in your life, or are there things about yourself that you would like to change, to improve, as we enter this new year? Many, if not most people, are not completely satisfied. But they do not know how to make changes. Or they do not believe it is possible to change anything about themselves. They've tried it before. But always, by February or March, things are back to where they were. And so, they have given up altogether on the idea of New Year's resolutions.

As God's Christian people, we do have the desire to improve ourselves. A Christian does not say to those around him, "This is how I am, and I do not intend to change; so just deal with it!" This, coming from a Christian, is actually a cry for help. And I do believe it is true that we all express this cry from time to time. We do want to make a fresh start, a new beginning. But we are not a structure made up of toy Lego blocks that you can just knock down and start over. We are human beings. We have hearts and minds, emotions and sensitivities. We have a past, and habits that are hard to change. And if we get knocked down, we may be afraid that that is how we will remain. And so, we stay the way we are, even though the way we are is not how we should be.

There is help and there is hope for people like us. But this help is not in the Roman god Janus for whom the month of January is named. Janus was acclaimed to be the god of beginnings. Thus, the whole idea of starting over when his month rolls around on the calendar, is steeped in pagan thinking. As Christians, we have a better way to start fresh. And it is, actually, the only way, for it is the way in which God is at work in us.

We have, in the text before us, the Baptism of Our Lord. This is no simple Scripture text. It is filled with meaning for us. And notice, that it is placed on the same page as our First Reading from Genesis. Coincidence? I think not.

Genesis chapter one is the beginning, our beginning. "*In the beginning...*" is how it reads. "*In the beginning, God...*" it says, not Janus. "*God created,*" and He created out of nothing. When there was only emptiness and darkness, when the earth was without form and void, God spoke and there was light.

This was your beginning and mine. So, why do we, why does anyone, feel it necessary to start over? To have a fresh beginning?

It's because sin entered into God's perfect creation. Sin plunged us back into darkness. Sin, your sin and mine, turns God's perfect order into disorder. It is our wretched sinfulness that robs us of meaningfulness and closeness with God, and turns our lives into what the earth was at the beginning – emptiness, without form and void.

This is why we must start over. The emptiness and disorder in our lives is not the work of God, but of sin. And it will ruin us, and bring us into everlasting ruin, unless we start over with a new beginning.

And this new beginning is right here in the baptism of our Lord. What we see in Genesis chapter one is also here at the Jordan River. "*In those days,*" we read, "*Jesus came...*" Into our world of darkness, He came. He enters into the emptiness and meaninglessness of our lives.

In the beginning, God's Spirit, it says in Genesis, was hovering over the waters. And so, we see this same Spirit, in the form of a dove, coming down over the waters in Jesus' baptism. Coincidence? Not at all.

In the beginning, in Genesis, God spoke and there was light. And so, also here at Jesus' baptism, God's voice speaks from heaven: "*You are My beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.*" And this same Jesus becomes, for our dark world and our dark lives, the true Light. And God is pleased with His Son as He is with the light He created. He calls the light good in Genesis chapter one; "*and there was evening and there was morning, the first day of creation.*" And so, also when Jesus, our Light, comes out of the waters of His baptism, a new day has begun – the first day of God's new creation.

Do you see it? Jesus, in His baptism, ushers in God's new creation! He is a new beginning, a fresh start for all who live in the darkness and emptiness of their sinful lives. In Jesus we start over. And in this way – through your baptism into Him. Your baptism and Jesus' baptism are wonderfully joined together. In His baptism, Jesus identifies with you, and in your baptism, you identify with Him. The water, the Spirit, the heavens opening, the Father's voice – all of these are not just for Jesus when He is baptized; they are for you! Jesus is baptized, not for His own sake, but for yours. To grant you the Holy Spirit, to open heaven to you, and to declare you as God's beloved son or daughter with whom, for Jesus' sake, He is well pleased.

When you feel emptiness in your life, therefore, remember your baptism into Christ. Here is real meaning for you. Your life is lived in Him, and His life in you. When your life seems to be disorder upon disorder, remember your baptism into Christ. "*If anyone is in Christ,*" says St. Paul, "*he is a new creation.*" Even if you cannot see it, therefore, God is ordering your life. He is leading you through all your chaos into the life in heaven He has for you.

And when your life becomes dark because of your sins, go, run to your baptism into Christ. Remember that He endured the darkness of the cross for you. And because He did, God forgives you, my friend. There is no dark corner of your heart that cannot be reached by His mercy. There is no dark sin in your past that is unforgivable. It's all forgiven! Believe this with all your heart, for it is true. Your baptism into Him who died for you makes this sure and certain.

Can you see, therefore, why we do not need January to begin anew? We begin each and every day anew through our baptism into Christ Jesus. Every day is a new start – the sins of the past being washed away by Jesus' blood. You are, as God declares through His Apostle, a new creation, His new creation in Jesus Christ. Amen.