

Have you ever heard the expression “He or she got a baptism by fire.”  
It was first referred to as a soldier’s first experience of coming under the fire of guns in battle.

What it has become to mean, is being thrown into a certain situation.  
Thrown into without any real choice in the matter.  
Or thrown into without having any sort of preparation or proper training.

To experience a baptism by fire is to find oneself in a situation one doesn’t want to be in, but one in which things just sort of worked out that way.

And it can be a bad feeling. The fear and stress can be daunting and nerve racking.  
The truth is, most of us don’t want to be just “thrown into” anything.

Today we are celebrating the Baptism of Our Lord, a day on which we remember the time Jesus came to John to be baptized and as He began His public ministry.

The “launching off point” from which He would begin the journey on the road to Jerusalem. The place where he would lay down his life for our sake.  
His was not a “baptism by fire” though. At least in the way we use that phrase.

Jesus wasn’t “thrown in” into this world.  
His Baptism was about His **choosing**.  
**Choosing** to enter into the fray of human life and to follow his Father’s will wherever it would lead him.

And, for doing that, we hear the Father’s words “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”  
The life that followed --- the traveling, the preaching, the ridicule, the suffering --- was certainly not easy for Jesus.

But he embraced it fully. Trusting in the Father’s great love for him. And that is what got Him through it all.

Sometimes our own lives can feel a little bit like a “baptism by fire”.  
Too much going on. Too much uncertainty.  
Too many risks.  
Too many challenges coming at us.  
Too much suffering.

And we can feel overwhelmed and ill-prepared. Life can seem to be just too much for us to handle. As I said before, it is not good feeling.  
It can worry us to no end.  
It can sap our strength, test our patience, and damage our spirit of hope.

And that’s when it is time to “fight fire with fire” as another saying goes.  
For in a very real sense --- by our own baptism --- we have a fire within us, the living

Spirit of God alive and well.

Ready to provide us with whatever we need to make it in this life.

Providing us with guidance, strength, wisdom, perseverance, patience.

The list of gifts goes on and on that are at our command to fight the fires of life with the **Fire of the Holy Spirit**.

And as it was for Jesus, it will be more than enough to sustain us and fill us with hope amidst the great ups, downs and uncertainties of life.

However, we are not able to tap into the power of the Spirit within each of us unless we are aware of his presence.

And unless we are willing to strive to live the life into which he is inviting us.

In other words, we can't simply see our own baptism --- and all that it means --- as some kind of snapshot one-time event, soon to be ignored, forgotten or neglected.

Rather we are called to continually embrace the great gift of our baptism. Ponder its meaning, accept the challenges, responsibilities, and privileges it provides.

We haven't been simply "thrown" into discipleship once and for all and that's it. It doesn't work that way.

Yes, we may "receive" baptism only once, but in reality it takes a lifetime to unpack its full meaning for us and our unique place in this world.

It is something we need to affirm each and every day. Something we too need to actively **choose**.

And, it's the "choosing" though that makes all the difference in the world. No longer will life be something that we are thrown into.

Rather, life will be something we in which we immerse ourselves. Something we experience with a certain hope, peace, joy, and confidence knowing in our hearts that we're not walking the journey alone.

Feeling the Spirit walking shoulder to shoulder with us carrying out God's unique plan for us.

And by continually choosing to reaffirm our baptism and to follow wherever Jesus leads, we will provide the Spirit with an opportunity to do some wonderful things through us, and for others.

But we must never forget one important point --- God never forces himself on us. He invites us. We, like Mary, are asked to say "yes".

Saying “yes” to our baptism and all that it means can have lasting effects for both ourselves and for those around us.

Who knows what difference we might make?

Who knows how the Spirit will choose to use us?

Who knows what impact we may have on those we love?

God is there to become fully alive in each of us, if we’d only let him.

Is ours a Baptism by fire? You bet it is. The love and fire of the Holy Spirit.

Let us come to this Eucharist in thanksgiving for the gift of own baptisms, and pray that it strengthens the loving fire of God that burns within each of us.