



A Statement of Service

**Feast of the Baptism of the Lord
11 January 2026**

Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

**“ A bruised reed he will not break,
and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.” - Isaiah 42:3**

This past weekend I took special note of the post of the Ukrainian Catholics meeting from Mass in Stoke-on-Trent. It read like this: “Please bring your vessels with water to be blessed...” Fr Taras continued: “I will also be doing pastoral visits with the Jordanian water in Liverpool. We will combine the service with the Feast of Theophany and the blessing of water at the end... If you would like me to visit with the Jordan water (this is a traditional pastoral visit), please send a message.” The Newsletter/Post included a beautiful icon of Jesus being baptised in the Jordan, which is so typical of art in the Eastern Catholic Church.

Already in 300 AD, the Eastern Church celebrated the Epiphany (cf Vatican News) and the Baptism of Jesus on 6 January. With the reform of the Liturgy in 1969, the date of the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord was set on the Sunday

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after the Epiphany in the Latin Church. The Christmas Season concludes with the celebration of this Feast, even though a ‘window’ is left open until 2 February, the day on which the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple is celebrated. The latter Feast is also known as Candlemass since Christ is proclaimed as the “light of the gentiles”. A parishioner in the Ukrainian Catholic Church commented that it was “a wonderful day celebrating the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan from John. The holy water was taken home to share with families and Fr Taras managed to consecrate a couple of houses.”

The Sunday Connection Commentary from Loyola Press points out: “The Baptism of Jesus is another manifestation of Christ, another epiphany. Christ’s Baptism inaugurates his mission. In an analogous way, our Baptism inaugurates our mission as Christians. This Sunday marks a transition from the Christmas season to Ordinary Time. In a way, today’s feast is the high point of the Christmas season. Before Jesus’ birth, angels announced to Mary and to Joseph who Jesus would be. At his birth, the shepherds and the magi recognise Jesus as the Messiah. At his baptism, Jesus accepts that he is God’s son and inaugurates that mission.”

The Ukrainian Catholic Church’s practice of marking this special day with the Solemn Blessing of Holy Water reminds us of the Solemn Blessing of Holy Water at Easter when we renew our Baptismal Vows. In Italy that is connected to the pastoral visits of Priests to homes and workplaces to impart the Blessing with Baptismal Water. It is my understanding of the Roman Liturgy that we can replace the regular Penitential Rite at Mass with a renewal of Baptismal

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Promises and Sprinkling with Holy Water. This Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is a most suitable occasion for this to take place. A Ukrainian Catholic Church post exploring the tradition of a solemn water blessing states: “This blessing is more than a ritual; it’s a poignant commemoration of our Lord’s Baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River – a pivotal moment when the Blessed Trinity was unveiled to humanity. Picture Jesus standing in the water, the Holy Spirit descends like a dove above Him, and the resonant voice of God the Father declaring, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased!”

Fr Joseph Pollard, in his book of Homilies “Finding Fresh Light” says of the decision by Jesus to undergo John’s Baptism “as an appropriate moment for Jesus to launch his own mission – with the trail already blazed for him by the herald John – and he launched that mission with a symbolic baptism.”

Looking to the other readings for the Feast we see how the Church understands Jesus’ Baptism. Isaiah sees him as the servant who will bring “justice to the nations … a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench.” It is service expressed in love and mercy. Fr Pollard reads the Lord’s Baptism, therefore, as his consecration by the Father as the Messianic Servant.” He goes on “I also read it as his own personal statement in public of the ministry of service he was embarking upon with full acceptance and with lasting commitment. In other words, the Lord’s Baptism is a statement about service. So, in parallel, must be our own.”

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Pollard goes on to say that the ingredients of our Christian ministries of service are clear: they are personified in the actions of Jesus, and we are strong, he says, on the corporal works of mercy today, but “we are surely weak on the spiritual (i.e., catechetical) works, whether we name these as the re-evangelisation of our country or on-going Christian formation in our parish churches and in our families... “Are we pulling our weight for Christ and for his kingdom values in the modern market place of ideas and lifestyles where others, with so much less to offer, are confidently active?”

Pollard concludes: “There is no reason why we should fail to see our own Baptism in Christ, like his in the Jordan, as our statement of service to others, for the sake of the kingdom of God.”

As we journey beyond the solemn ceremonies, Holy Water can become a powerful tool in our daily lives. The Ukrainian Catholic Church Post says, “Bless yourselves or others before a journey, protect your children by blessing them before bedtime, and seek God’s grace for recovery by sprinkling with Holy Water when sick. In times of temptation or family difficulties, Holy Water brings strength and consolation. Embrace the grace that Holy Water can bring to various events in your life.”

“As we set out to make our personal statement of service on this Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, the use of Holy Water becomes a profound expression of our unwavering trust in God’s providence.” (cf eeparchy.com)

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