

The Baptism of the Lord (A)

(Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7; Acts 10:34-38; Matthew 3:13-17)

In the gospel, Jesus is about thirty years old and we know very little about Him. At age twelve He appeared and was lost in the Temple. Here it is, eighteen years later when He again appears at the River Jordan where John is baptizing, and preaching about the Kingdom. Jesus says to John in effect, “Here I am, baptize Me, I want to be part of this.”

The Holy Spirit comes in the form of a dove and the voice of God says, “This is My Son, the Beloved; My favor rests on Him” (Mt.3:17). But it doesn’t end there. There was a tremendous experience that took place within the person of Jesus. God calls Him into public ministry and Jesus answers “Yes!” God guides Jesus toward complete fulfillment of His life’s mission and Jesus follows that guidance.

But we need to know now what it means to us. In Jesus’ Baptism, we see that God does call us and God does lead us and God does guide us. I am talking about us right now...this moment...there is an influence in our lives coming from God.

In baptism we personally entered the Big Story. There is nothing anyone can do to defeat God’s purpose. And this is our Baptismal hope...this is the living water that wells up inside and enables us to share in the eternal life of God now.

We need to ask ourselves, each of us who follow Jesus, “Am I making a day-by-day conscientious effort to share His Living Water through the life I am living, and the works I am performing? Am I going out and preaching the good news...am I letting it be known that there’s a new world coming?”

I have a book entitled, “*The Rite of Baptism for Children*,” with all the prayers and readings for the sacrament. But one thing (regrettably) I don’t have is the name and date of the first child I had ever baptized. I know it was a big day for that child and her parents/godparents. But, this one thing I do know...no matter how many baptisms I have done in my 26+ years since ordination, the hairs on the back of my neck still stand up whenever I do a child’s baptism. It is an awesome responsibility and honor for me to welcome a new member into the mystery we call the Body of Christ.

Of course, the biggest day for baptism is the one we’ve just heard in the gospel: the baptism of Jesus. I don’t know think that John the Baptist wrote down the first baptism he did in any book. But we do have this account in the gospels, and we hear it once again and are reminded: this is where it all began.

Baptism was the beginning of Christ's public ministry – and for the rest of us, our own baptism marks the beginning of our own lives as Catholic Christians. Most of us were baptized when we were infants, so we don't remember it. And the chances are, if you have been a part of a baptism – as a parent or a godparent or just a relative looking on – there's a lot going on that you may not have noticed.

Today is a good day for us to notice what we may have been missing – to look beyond the water and the oil and the prayers and the crying babies and the christening gown that was worn by your great grandmother's second cousin. This is a chance to reflect on what this sacrament means —and, in particular, how it is celebrated.

One of the things about the baptism ritual is that it doesn't begin with a hymn or a song or a prayer. It begins with a question:

“What name do you give your child?”

Those seven words are deceptively simple. Baptism is about who we are—and who we will be. It defines us in a new way: as Catholic Christians. We are transformed. We become a new creation. **Having a name, an identity, is critical to that.**

Baptism entails the commitment of parents – and, significantly, godparents. Being a godparent entails *commitment*: a commitment to the Catholic faith, and to living that faith with fidelity, enthusiasm and joy. That means living it in such a way that their godchildren will see what they do, how they pray, what they value, how they love and they will say: “I want to be like that.”

As godparents, we are talking about a role that has responsibilities, to help raise the child in the faith that they profess. During the baptism, godparents publicly profess their belief in Christ, the Trinity, the Virgin Mary and all the other tenets of our faith. They make a commitment to the faith, and to helping these children live that faith.

Early on in the rite, the priest or deacon says, “Dear children, the Christian community welcomes you with great joy.” The Church celebrates this sacrament as a *community*—because as a community, we pray together, rejoice together, grieve together, and grow together. The Christian life isn't lived in isolation. And we don't celebrate our sacraments that way, either. Ideally, the guidelines for baptism make clear: “All recently born babies should be baptized at a common celebration on the same day.”

The gospel mentions other people who were there and baptized along with Jesus. It wasn't something he did alone. He had his community around him.

And so do all of us. Because of baptism, I'm connected to you, and you're connected to me. And we're all connected to a billion other believers.

That connects us, also, to the man baptized in the Jordan two thousand years ago. Near the end of the baptism rite, there's a prayer reminding us that because of baptism, we call God our Father. Because of it, too, we call Jesus our brother—the one who showed us by his example how to begin the great mission of the gospel, through water and the Spirit. Today *Jesus'* mission is *our* mission. The same Spirit that accompanied him accompanies us as we strive to live the gospel, to love beyond all measure, to make the world new. Baptism gives us the grace to do that. It has made each of us a new creation.

As we recall the baptism of Christ, and its significance for our own baptisms, let us strive every day to be that “new creation;” to embrace our commitment to our baptism and all that it entails; and to support and welcome those in our community celebrating this sacrament.

These are the raw ingredients of what it means to be a Christian. Or as the baptism rite puts it so beautifully:

***“This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church.
We are proud to profess it, in Christ Jesus our Lord.”***

With excerpts from “Sunday Sermons On Line” and Deacon Greg Kandra

Deacon Gregory J Cecere
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