

BAPTISM OF THE LORD YEAR – (Homily 02)

“Beloved Sons and Daughters of God”

(Is 40:1-5, 9-11; Ps 104; Lk 3:15-16, 21-22)

Daniel O’Donnell, well known Irish tenor, tells the story during his show of the over-zealous preacher who tried to cure a man of his alcoholism by fiery preaching and a river baptism. In the process of baptism, the preacher repeatedly held the man’s head under water, than pulled him up asked him if he found Jesus. And each time he did this, the man replied no, he had not. The third time he did this and was asked if he found Jesus, the man replied, “Are you sure this is where he fell in?”

This feast of the Baptism of our Lord today invites us to live our baptism to the full as beloved sons and daughters of God.

In the first reading proclaimed today, Isaiah prophecies that someday God will come in glory and power. This reading continues the theme of Advent, of preparing the way of the Lord.

In the Gospel, we see that God has indeed come in the person of Jesus, though the glory and power of God in Jesus is of a hidden, different nature. In his Incarnation, Jesus took on our frail humanity, fully and completely. In his baptism in the Jordan, he took on our sinful humanity, to redeem it and to sanctify it, to make us holy. His baptism reveals even more the love of God for us, as the Father speaks words of love to the Son, the beloved.

There is an amazing link between three major events in Jesus life. At his birth, choirs of angels from heaven sang the glory of God. At his baptism, the Father’s voice speaks from the heavens and blesses Jesus with a father’s blessing. And at the time of his death on the cross, the veil of the Temple is torn open. All three incidents are related, and all speak of an in-breaking of the power of God into our wounded humanity. At his birth, heaven comes to earth. At his baptism, again heaven comes to earth. At his death, the veil separating our sinful humanity from God is torn apart and earth begins to rise up to heaven.

The baptism of Jesus is contrasted to the baptism of John. John could only encourage people to repent; Jesus could give them the gift of repentance. John could only mention the Holy Spirit; Jesus would impart the Holy Spirit to his followers. John could only talk about the forgiveness of sins; Jesus could forgive sins and impart eternal life.

The blessing that Jesus receives from the Father empowers him to accept death on the cross as the way that he would redeem humanity. It was that blessing, that bonding with the Father and that experience of acceptance and oneness with the Father that gave Jesus the courage and strength he would need to be faithful to his mission. There is here a model for human parents, mothers and fathers, to also bless their children, to speak well of them, to affirm them, as a way of empowering them to live their lives to the full.

In the second reading, we come full circle. Paul recounts that God has come in Jesus Christ; that he has brought salvation to all through healing and forgiveness, and made us heirs of eternal life.

We can learn deeper insights into the meaning of our own baptism from this feast. What God has done for Jesus; God also wants to do for us. In baptism we hear those words as well; we are his beloved, we become one with God and with Jesus. We can live without fear and perhaps should make our own the bumper sticker – No Fear! We need to be convinced of this call to childlikeness in trust and confidence and the ability to live in the moment, free from fear

At the western bishops' retreat at Westminster Abbey in Mission, B.C. one year, homilist Bishop Gary Gordon, a graduate of that seminary, contrasted the cells of the abbey with the cells of a nearby prison. The difference is that the monks of the abbey have heard those words of being loved, allowing them to choose a life of prayer and solitude, in peace and joy, whereas the prisoners probably never did hear them, leading them to act out of anger and resulting in involuntary, painful and harsh confinement in their prison cells. What a difference faith, baptism and love makes.

As we celebrate the Eucharist, we hear those words once again - You are my beloved; my favor rests on you – as we listen to God's Word and receive Jesus in communion as children of God. We are then commissioned to bring the light and love of Christ to the world that yearns to hear those same words that we heard in our baptism.

So remember, this feast of the Baptism of our Lord today invites us to live our baptism to the full as beloved sons and daughters of God.