

HOMILY for the BAPTISM OF THE LORD – Year ABC

A mother decided it was time that her three sons get baptized. On the designated Sunday morning as they were on their way to church, the mother noticed that her nine-year-old seemed to be a bit preoccupied.

When she asked him what the problem was, he said, “Mom, I want to go first,”
“Why do you want to go first?” she asked.

“Because,” he began & then paused for a few seconds, “I really don’t want to be baptized in water that has all of my brothers’ sins floating around in it.”

Maybe, that’s why Jesus did not mind being the first to get baptized in His Christian Church. Anyway, this Sunday the Church calls us to celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. That event marks the beginning of the Lord’s official ministry. After today, Jesus went around from town to town to preach His Good News & restore people to new life through healing & nourishing. He kept Himself busy with that mission from sunrise to sunset, sometimes even forgot to eat & rest. He could not do it all by Himself due to its great demand. That is why He recruited twelve Apostles & other helping hands to assist Him. He also called on you & other Christians in the twenty-first century to lend Him a helping hand with His mission of salvation. Otherwise, His mission would not get done & the world would remain a big mess. That would break Jesus’ heart & make His trip to earth at Christmas time useless. So, would you answer Jesus’ call & keep His mission going? And what does it mean to be a baptized Christian?

We often hear Christians claim that baptism is the gateway for someone to get to Heaven or our salvation in the end. That is why the Church has rushed Church has rushed Christian candidates through its “Baptismal machine” without fully informing them about the expectations & responsibilities of a Christian. In fact, I have heard how some Christians get baptized at a Youth Camp or a public event without any paperwork or careful preparation. Worst yet, the Church has not focused & discussed much on what it means to be a baptized Christian. Thankfully, this Sunday’s Readings spell out what the Lord calls us to do as His disciples.

This Sunday’s Gospel shares with us that one of the most important virtues that all baptized Christians must be rooted in is humility. Jesus, who was acknowledged at the baptismal site as the Son of the Trinitarian God, did not need to go through the human ritual baptism. But, He humbly subjected Himself to the baptism by John the Baptist. Even John, who did the Baptism for Jesus, modeled his life after the virtue of humility & said, “I am baptizing you in water, but there is one to come who is mightier than I. I am not fit to loosen His sandal strap. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit & in fire.” As you can see, humility was displayed by not only Jesus, who received the Baptism, but also John, who conducted it. No doubt, they both would want their disciples to make humility an important part of their lives. Unfortunately, that is something we do not see the Church mention a lot as a great requirement of good Christian living. Hopefully, we will not forget to practice humility in our daily life.

Next, this Sunday’s Second Reading shares with us what Jesus did after His Baptism as following, “...I take it you know what has been reported all over Judea about Jesus of Nazareth, beginning in Galilee with the baptism John preached; of the way God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit & power. He went about doing good works & healing all who were in the grip of the devil, & God was with Him.” After His baptism, Jesus evidently went around to different towns

doing good works & healing all the suffering & the afflicted. He healed the blind, the deaf, the mute, the lame, the sick, the crippled, the leper, the lunatic, & the possessed. He fed the hungry & comforted the sorrowful. More importantly, He preached the message of hope & reconciliation. His disciples did the same after His death & resurrection. They did not hide behind a locked door for fear of the authority. But, they went all over the world to preach Jesus' Good News & heal the broken. That is what it means to answer the baptismal call.

Meanwhile, this Sunday's First Reading lets us know what the Lord would want His servants & followers to do. It says, "...He [my servant] shall bring forth justice to the nations... I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice; I have grasped you by the hand; I have formed you & set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, & from the dungeon, those who live in darkness." Evidently, the Lord wants His servants to be a sign of His presence to the people like a divine covenant & a light for the nations. He calls His followers to restore sight to the blind, set prisoners free from the dungeon, & bring justice to the nations. For the Lord knows that there are a lot of injustices on earth. He realizes many people are blind & imprisoned by the power of darkness to experience a life of freedom & truth. He wants His followers to bring the light & justice back to their world.

As you can see, there are plenty of work for the Lord's followers to do in the world. It is not only people but also nations that need help. If we look out into the world these days, we will see that is quite true. Unfortunately, many Christians have chosen to do nothing to help our broken world or simply be indifferent to the cry of the suffering. Worst yet, some have joined hands with the power of darkness & make our current situation even worse. No wonder why we have seen so much evil & violence in our society these days. If we heed the message of this Sunday's Readings, we got to reverse that trend & do the saving work of Jesus to carry on His mission of salvation.

My dear brothers & sisters, what does it mean for us to be a baptized Christian? Do we only want to go to Heaven without doing anything for Jesus? As His followers, we got to continue His saving work & make a difference in our world every day. We must do all the work that He did & fulfill the expectations mentioned in this Sunday's Readings. That is what it means to be a baptized Christian. Can you imagine that you would be able to save one soul or make a difference in someone's life?