

HOMILY for the BAPTISM OF THE LORD – Year A

During Bible study class, Freddie was much more interested in his new hot rod toy car than in the lesson. His fidgeting didn't escape the nun's notice, so she decided to give him a spot quiz. "Who was God's Son, Freddie?" she asked.

The girl behind Freddie poked him hard with her pencil & he cried out, "Jesus!"

"Very good," said the nun. "Now, who is the first member of the Holy Trinity?"

"The girl poked Freddie even harder. "God Almighty!" he blurted.

"All right," said the Sister, deciding to throw him a trick question. "Now tell me what Eve said to Adam their first week together."

Once again the girl jabbed Freddie, & he screamed, "You prick me with that one more time; & I'm going to shove it up your butts!"

Anyway, this Sunday the Church invites us to celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord. The whole ceremony was recorded like what we have heard in this Sunday's Gospel. The Church has adopted similar ceremony when it baptizes its new members & welcomes them into the family of Jesus Christ. The Church believes that the ritual of baptism is not only a Christian initiation for its new members but also the gateway for them to get to the Kingdom of Heaven & find salvation in the end. So, what is the significant meaning of this Feast for us Christians? Why did Jesus need to subject Himself to the baptism by John?

Many Christians have mistakenly assumed that once they are baptized, they are automatically guaranteed to be in Heaven without having to do anything else. It does not matter how many terrible things they might have done after their baptisms, they think that they would still be in Heaven. It does not matter what type of lifestyle they might have followed after their baptisms, they presume that they would still have a place in Heaven. That is why many Christians have been baptized as if they take a regular shower without any serious understanding and commitment to it. That is why we have seen a big discrepancy between the lifestyle of some Christians and the one of our Lord Jesus. Surely the baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity gives us a good start on the way to Heaven. But, it is not a guarantee for us to have a seat in Heaven if we do not try to live up to Jesus' Commandments & lifestyle. Otherwise, our baptism would simply be a nice memory.

The Feast of the Baptism of our Lord often marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. For, right after Jesus was baptized, He did not go home & do nothing. Rather, He had begun His work of salvation by feeding the hungry, healing the suffering, & preaching His Good News to the hopeless. He fed several hungry crowds with meager resources available & refused to turn them away for fend for themselves. He healed all kinds of suffering people: the blind, the deaf, the mute, the crippled, the possessed, the leper, the sick, the dying, & the afflicted with rare diseases. Religious leaders demanded Jesus to hold off His healing on the Jewish Sabbath Days & make the suffering endure much longer. But, Jesus often had much compassion for all the suffering & would not make them endure one minute longer. That is why Jesus usually healed anyone who came to Him for help immediately. But, the best thing that Jesus did during His years of public ministry was to bring His Good News, particularly the Beatitudes, to the outcast & the hopeless. He told the poor & the social outcast that the Lord would not abandon them. He promised them that the Lord is on their side & the Kingdom of God is theirs. That is what it

means to be baptized in the eyes of Jesus, namely, to roll up our sleeves & do His work of salvation.

Besides all of that work during His ministry, Jesus had shown us a great role model of good Christian discipleship. He went from town to village to preach His Good News & help out people in need. He did not just talk & pray for the suffering & the social outcast. He went out to experience their pain & did everything possible to ease their suffering. Ironically, I have seen many Christians do the opposite as they have often ignored all the suffering in the world while asking the Lord to help them with their own problems. They pray only for their own needs & have no prayer left for their suffering neighbors. They do not want to share their meager resources & invite Jesus to use them to perform little miracles of feeding a hungry crowd like the boy did with his few loaves of bread & a couple of dried fish in the Gospels. That is why our world is still ravaged by greed, envy, selfishness, hate, violence, killing, & other social problems. If each Christian would live up to one's baptismal calling & follow Jesus' example of good Christian discipleship, we would see a much different world compared to the current one. We would see more kindness & compassion instead of hate & violence.

One last important lesson that Jesus could teach us today with His baptism by John is His act of humility. As you might know, Jesus did not have any sin being the Son of God. Hence, He would not need to go through a baptism. He should conduct a baptism & baptize John instead. But, He subjected Himself to John's baptism & made John wonder about it. Jesus' act of humility & life of virtues shines brightly on this occasion & also throughout His whole life. If each Christian would practice humility every day, we would have less fighting & bickering due to pride & loathing. If all Christians would search for a life of virtues, & encourage the world to do the same, we would see more miracles & experience Jesus all around us from sunrise to sunset. Most importantly, a lot of people would want to learn more about Jesus & our Christian/Catholic faith. We would see big crowds flocking to churches like we have heard happening to Jesus back then. That is the challenge & the baptismal calling for each & every one of us.

My dear brothers & sisters, what does the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord mean to you? Why have you been baptized & wanted to be a Christian/Catholic? Speaking for myself, I'm honored & thankful to be a disciple of Jesus & continued to see Him by my side through all the ups & downs, twists & turns of my life. I hope I have not let Him down by my Christian way of life. I wonder if I could do more to show Him & His Good News to the world. I pray that when I see Him at the Gate of Heaven, He would tell me, "Peter, good & faithful servant, come & inherit the Kingdom of Heaven prepared for you from the foundation of the world!"