

Baptism of the Lord – B  
11 January 2009

10 years ago today – on this day – the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord – I was on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land – standing on the shore of the Jordan River, celebrating Mass. Can you imagine our excitement? To be at the Jordan River on the day when the Church remembers Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist. It was really exciting – but it got better!

The Psalm for that Sunday said, “The God of glory thunders...” The day we were at the Jordan River it was overcast and rainy – and, you guessed it, as soon as the lector read that line – IT THUNDERED! We all went, oooooooooooooo...

Then, in the Gospel, it says that “the heavens were torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descended upon Him.” Guess what happened as the deacon read that line? This bird came SWOOPING down out of nowhere and dive-bombed us! Again, we all just went, Whoaaa....

It was a really cool moment when we felt we were re-living Jesus’ baptism – when all these events happened. Well, we may not be at the Jordan river, but today, we too are re-living this event of Jesus’ baptism – because each of us has shared in that Baptism.

Today is a great opportunity for us to reflect on the awesomeness of our own Baptisms and remember what incredible things God did for us at that moment – and to renew our own baptismal promises to God.

What happened when we were Baptized? Well, of course, original sin was removed. God restores us and recreated us. The relationship with God that was destroyed in the disobedience of Adam & Eve was restored – we were made friends of God once again – but not only friends – sons and daughters! We were made God’s Children! What did Jesus hear as he comes up out of the water? “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” That’s what we ALL hear when WE come up out of the waters of baptism – YOU are my beloved son/daughter, with whom I am well pleased!

In Baptism we are filled with God’s life – with Grace – with Sanctifying Grace – with all that makes us holy and pleasing to God. At that moment, as the heavens open, as the dove comes down – we are made perfect and holy! When you held your newly baptized baby in your arms, you held a SAINT!

Throughout this year, we have this image of St. Paul here in front of us, reminding us of this Jubilee Year celebrating the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth. So, as we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, it's good for us to review what St. Paul has to say about Baptism.

St. Paul wrote to the Romans: "Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were indeed buried with Him thorough baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life."

When we were baptized, we died with Christ – and rose with Him to new life.

Let's look at our new baptismal font – what does it tell us – from the bottom up?

The cross – on the floor is the cross – beginning at the central doors – calling us, beckoning us to come in – to enter into the mystery of death & life. Then there, in the middle of the cross – is the font – in Baptism we die with Christ on the cross – to sin, to selfishness – in order to rise to a new life.

The font itself – every part of it – is made up of how many side? 8. Eight is a significant number – how many days in a week? Seven. If it's the 8<sup>th</sup> day – it's a new beginning, a new start. In the Baptismal Font, we make a new beginning, a new start – a whole new life – lived in imitation of Christ.

For St. Paul, Baptism is a RADICAL sacrament for Christians – and it means that they are called to a more radical existence than that of non-Christians, of pagans. For St. Paul, we Baptized Christians are called to live a life in radical opposition to the lives of everyone else. And this is the meaning of Baptism in our daily lives.

If through baptism we are called to live like Christ – or as St. Paul puts it, to live a radical new life – what does that mean? Well, it means that each of us lives the vocation to which God called us at the moment of Baptism – and we live that vocation RADICALLY!

Many are called to live the vocation of Marriage – live it RADICALLY! Our culture today says that marriage is not "till death do us part," but "till 'fat and ugly thou art.'" Marriage is not just a mutual agreement of co-existence and co-dependence, marriage is a RADICAL giving of myself – of all my efforts and energy and being – for the good of the other – and the children. The vocation of Marriage, to which we Christians are called, is one way in which we participate in

Christ's death – dying to ourselves out of love for the other. Selfishness and self-interest have no place in Christian marriage – it is a radical self-gift for the good of the other.

Some are called to single life – again, not just the life of a bachelor, but a life of service and self-gift to others. I think of a man I knew in Columbus, where I went to seminary. He was a single man and a doctor – and just about every waking moment was given to “pro-bono” work for the poor or work in the parish. His whole life was a gift to the poor, to the needy, to the needs of the Church. A single life is not a life of going out to the bars and one night stands, but a life of going out of our way to serve others and standing up for those who are forgotten.

Still others are called to another, radical way of life – to consecrated life or priesthood. I tell you this year after year, but, as I look around the members of this parish, I am absolutely convinced that God is calling SOME of our young people to follow Him in this radical kind of life – which our culture and world ridicules and says is “abnormal” and “unhealthy.” But, I can tell you from experience, is fully satisfying and full of life and vigor. Priesthood and religious life is NOT easy – it's a really difficult life – it's a challenge at every moment – but so is married life, right?

No matter the way of life to which we are called – the key is baptism – and the radical change that occurs in us at that moment – and the radical way in which we are called to live that new life.

This week, National Vocations Awareness Week, pray with me that EVERY vocation will be renewed – that married people will commit themselves to their spouse and children with RADICAL self-giving; that single people will expend their energy serving others; that more young men and women will hear and respond to the Lord's call to service in the priesthood and consecrated life – and that we, your priests, will live the radical call of our vocations with faithfulness and fidelity to God's grace.

Remember the radical life to which you are called by your own baptism – and ask the Lord to help you live that radical life to the full – as God's beloved son or daughter.