

Homily

Baptism of the Lord - A

Rev. Peter G. Jankowski

January 10-11, 2025

Is 42: 1-4, 6-7

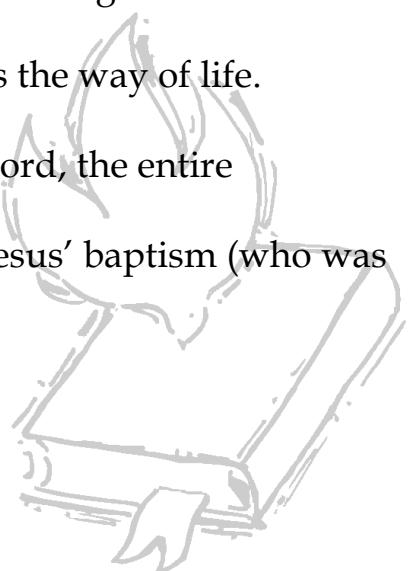
Ps 29: 1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10

Acts 10: 34-38

Mt 3: 13-17

As we come to the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of Ordinary Time, obviously, all the Christmas decorations have been boxed up and put away, all the floods of people that came for Christmas Masses have gone back to their mundane lives (Mircea Eliade would call it, "Profane Lives"), we return to world which often tries to beat us down in so many different ways and we have to resign ourselves to the ways of the world, "accepting the things we cannot change, courage to change the things we can and wisdom to know the difference" (the "Serenity Prayer," which at times I agree and, according to Christian principles, sometimes we have to discard). This is the way of life.

On this particular feast of the Baptism of the Lord, the entire Christmas Season is illustrated by this image of Jesus' baptism (who was baptized for our sake, not his own... he is God!).



The readings that on which we focus today (the first reading from Isaiah and the second reading from the Acts of the Apostles, which are read every single liturgical year), we are told that God you and me, just like God called Isaiah, to preach the word, knowing that people in the world most likely are *not* going to listen. In the 7th Century BC, Isaiah tried to get the Chosen People to listen, but he was not able to succeed, but that is not the point. Isaiah was called to preach the message – he tried to do God’s work. Isaiah learned, as we do today, that as soon as that seed is planted into the ground and dies, it bears much fruit but if we do not plant the seed, it just remains a seed. The constant theme on which we focus in our scripture readings is that we are called to plant that seed.

The second reading from today’s scripture is the story of St. Peter visiting house of Cornelius and then baptizing Cornelius, the first Gentile convert to Christianity. Cornelius was baptized by the first pope of the Catholic Church, who extended symbolically this ministry of God, this faith of God, not just the one people, but to *all* people.

Our gospel reading today commemorates the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. In the gospel of Matthew, the heavenly Father's voice descends down and says, "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased." Symbolically and otherwise, the Father commissions the Son to do this ministry.

In all three cases, whether it be Isaiah, whether it be St. Peter, whether it be our Lord, in the eyes of humanity, *all three failed in their respective ministries*, just like in the eyes of humanity, all kinds of ministries fail, because human needs and human values and human thoughts often take precedence in the secular world to the divine needs that will get us to heaven.

So how do we get to heaven with this mentality? For those very few who choose to follow God, to get to heaven, we must put away the evils of the world and society (the ones that the world and society at large embrace) and we must focus on what is good, as God teaches us to do. "Turn away from sin and believe in the gospel" (paraphrase of Mk 1: 15); these are words that we use on Ash Wednesday.

As we end our Christmas Season thirty years down the line with the Baptism of the Lord, today is supposed to commemorate first day where we begin this public ministry, the day that we take what we learned at Christmas. We embrace the message that God was willing to set that example by coming down on earth, by taking on that human will and that human nature, to suffer and die for us so we might have a chance to embrace an everlasting life with God.

The Epiphany story from last week, where Jesus was willing to suffer and die so we would have a chance at life, is supposed to provide the strength for us to continue within our respective ministries. If we are willing to follow our Lord's path and extend ourselves out to others as God did for us, then we understand the Christmas message in its entirety.

As the Church's history in the United States has taught us, prior to the 1960s, the influx of Christian immigrants that came to our country was European - Catholic immigrants came from Ireland, Germany, Italy and Spain, etc. *During and after* the 1960s, a huge influx of Catholic

immigrants entered the United States from Latin American Countries. Prior to the 1960s, many of our communities were called “national Churches”; those at St. Anne created French-Canadian and at St. Patrick’s, the Dutch established that Church, little pockets of faithful who, according to the tradition of national Churches, would generally accept only those from their own geographical culture into the community.

The readings on which we focus today teach us that we have to break open the shell, and we need to welcome every person from every culture, as St. Peter did for Cornelius, the first Gentile convert into the faith. When we do this, good things happen to the faith because when we open our doors to everyone, then our churches grow.

Sometimes, though, the local Churches seem to recede rather than grow we limit ourselves to that “National Church” mentality which is not filling the pews of our churches. Sometimes with that mentality, parishioners might say, “Our parish is dying; not a lot of people are coming to Church.” Why? That is because we do not extend ourselves

out and welcome everybody in to tell everybody that they are welcomed and that they are loved, as St. Peter did for Cornelius (later, St. Paul challenged Peter because the first pope did not continue to welcome Gentiles into the fold as St. Paul thought he should – see Galatians 2: 1-11). If we extended ourselves and welcomed *everyone* into our respective parishes, then we understand what our purpose in life is, to bring God's message, Christ crucified, to the nations, so the nations would have the same chance of receiving the Lord's grace as we do.

As we end this Christmas Season with this feast of the Lord's baptism, we learn that if we follow God's example of welcome, then we are showing God that we are acting like Christ for the sake of everyone and, as a result, we have a chance to get to heaven as well.

As a way to commemorate this feast, instead of the Nicene Creed after this homily, I instead choose to have the faithful renew their baptismal promises, reminding you and me concerning why we are living this faith of God in the first place. We renew our baptismal promises every Easter, at the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday Masses.

We renew our baptismal promises (or make them in the name of the children baptized) prior to our sacraments of Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation here at the parishes, so that those receiving the sacraments understand that they have been commissioned.

When those who receive the sacraments encounter God (the definition of “sacrament”) with these special gifts, they have been commissioned to go out to the corners of the earth and to proclaim Christ crucified (Acts 1: 8), just like the rest of us.

So I ask you, please, be invested somehow, some way in sharing that baptismal commissioning by inviting others to the faith. Pick up a phone, call somebody, visit your neighbors and make somebody realize that they are important and have value. Bring communion to the homebound; provide them with religious education. Pray at home for the sick and the dead. Pick up your rosary for your families and your friends, and those here in the parishes who continue on this work.

We will do what we can to help you, but we need your help as well, because every single one of us, just like Isaiah, every single one of us has

been called to ministry. So let us not take that baptismal commissioning for granted. Let us embrace the ministries that God has sent us to carry to the ends of the earth. Let us share those ministries with the people that we meet. This is our prayer.