

Baptism of Lord Homily Year C St Pius & St Anthony (2024)

With the holidays, a lot of family favorite recipe foods, circulate and are shared, and someone recently gave me some of their delicious homemade spicy crackers (saltines all flavored up)! Yes, they are very good, but there was fire in them (I think dipped in Carolina Reaper juice!) I have a limit of eating only at a time. But I'm sure we have all had the experience of eating something (chili, chicken wings, etc) that set a fire in our mouth.

I am told that the chemical capsaicin (creates that sensation for us) and the chemical actually binds to our physical nerve receptors, that are the same receptors activated if there was physical flame burning our skin. Like real Fire!

I remember one time back in high school, I was having lunch with my boss, while we were out on a delivery call (it was a great, a fun job-he owned an arcade company and I was the summer help who rode along, to deliver or service game machines or empty the coin-boxes). We stopped at a Wendy's. And both hit the salad bar. We are eating and he says something about me trying a bite of something, and drops it half on my plate corner, saying seriously, "Try this, don't eat the light yellow one, it's bad, but the dark army green none is good!" Now, I'm thrilled about eating something I didn't pick myself off the bar, but I'm thinking, **'He's my boss', also he's driving!** So I ate the whole piece, and at first nothing, but he kept looking at me, and sure enough, explosion of pain burning me, eyes watering, couldn't talk, it was bad.... And he thought it was all so funny, I was dying and he was laughing (I have to think now, did that 'create a hostile workplace?") But what comes around goes around! I got my laugh back a couple months later when, only because **'just he'**, would tie down the machines in the back of the truck and once coming down a hilly street in 'Madisonville, we stopped suddenly at a light and glass flew all through the cab covering us – the video game SpyHunter had slid through the back window—"But because he said, I didn't know how to tie the machines down!" This was all him! My laugh and his cry!

But my message about bringing up his hot pepper trick, is that I thought there was **fire in that food**. And that is what John the Baptist tells us about the difference between his baptism, before Christ goes through it and afterward.

Jesus will bring the fire to John's water. John minimized (as the humble servant of God that he is) minimized his water ritual, compared to what Jesus later accomplishes. When the Messiah comes, John says, the

Messiah will bring the fire of the Holy Spirit. That will put life in us- the Holy Spirit fire, will light us up. We can think of the imagery of water and fire: Water may puddle and pool, but fire always pushes us. We may lounge lazily in water, but when fire is felt, we move and take action. Fire is a great motivator. Fire moves us to action, and to get going. Jesus brings that life giving action. I see a connection between John's comparison of his water work to Jesus 'Holy Spirit fire' work, similar to what the 4th evangelist-John says in the beginning of his gospel.

I don't know how much Luke knows about the gospel of John's wedding at Cana miracle but that miracle demonstrates the same thing that the Baptist was proclaiming: Water is good for washing, but to animate us (give us life=get us going) the spirit wine of Jesus is better! (Jesus as 'finest' wine served last in John 2:10). So, John the preparatory first servings, and Jesus brings on the hearty drink. Receiving Jesus brings us to life (reborn), gets us moving for Him

Yet, on this Baptism of the Lord Feast, a lot of people raise the question, "Wait, just why did Jesus need to go through the baptism of John?" He is God, so what is Jesus washed of, He doesn't need repentance and forgiveness! Well, the short answer is that Jesus didn't need to. It is we who needed Him to go through baptism. A church bishop, named St Maximus of Turin, says it best, (he was a student of the great St Ambrose-who also taught St Augustine late 300's)! St Maximus of Turin explains it in a homily saying, "***Christ is baptized, not to be made holy by the water, but to make the water holy (for us)...***" The water doesn't consecrate Him, He consecrates it by His touch and entrance in it. He purifies the source for us, and calls us to step into/through the water of baptism following Him! Jesus is baptized for us – to open the Way for us.

But again, John is so humble about his little (water-way) role that gets us ready for the fire & spirit that Jesus will bring to us. A big difference to see between John's water and Jesus' fire in baptism, is to say it, that John's work may get us into the desert, but Jesus will move us into the promised land (Moses is in the background here, with all John's talk about sandals and worthiness – but that is another study of how we encounter God in Jesus-Joh is calling to mind the whole burning bush experience of Moses).

But Baptism is our path to both encountering God and getting to the promised land. I like how Luke is very intentional and tight as a writer, about his comparisons and parallels at times. I see a wonderful parallel between this opening scene of Jesus' ministry at Jordan river and his closing scene on the cross! In today's gospel we hear Luke say, in 3:21-22,

“1) **heaven was opened** and the 2) **Holy Spirit descended** upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a **voice** came from heaven, “You are my 3) **beloved Son**; with you I am well pleased.” Again, Luke is so good about tying things together, and we will find those same three elements at the beginning here of Jesus’ ministry, also at Jesus’ last moments of ministry on the cross (connects baptism and ‘death -rebirth’ for us too) In Luke 23:45-46, we read, that “the 1) **veil of the temple was torn down the middle** (heaven-the Holy opened to us). Jesus cried out in a loud 3) **voice**, “**Father** (Father claimed Son first, Son completes Will-Mission of Father), into your hands I commend my 2) **spirit.**” (**Spirit first came down, and now Spirit returned**). Luke wonderfully brings us back to the beginning.

And this Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is meant to move us to be renewed in our baptism and for us to take up fresh and again our discipleship with Christ, the commitment/mission baptism puts on us. Baptism opens heaven (promised land) as path for us, if we receive that Holy Spirit of God, accepting the Father’s Will, His kingdom all of us as His children (sons & daughters). It all starts new today as we recommit ourselves again to baptism in Christ. We will profess our faith together and be freshened in the spirit-filled waters of our baptism as I sprinkle you anew the holy baptismal water. May we be continually reborn to new life in Christ, committed to serving Him and being His Spirit-led disciples!