

St Pius & St Anthony Homily Baptism of the Lord Year C

Once more. Have I ever said this, “I love our Catholic tradition of festive seasons (more than one day) that allows us to fully celebrate a mystery of our faith-Christ’s death & resurrection all of Easter-50 days & Christmas 12-19 days?” But even seasons, like a single day, do come to an end. Or do they? Many people, not like us, may not make a lot out of single day celebrations. For example, it may surprise us, but we do have Christian brothers and sisters (other churches) who tell me, ‘We don’t celebrate Christmas-Dec 25’ because Jesus is born every day every time a new believer opens his/her heart accepting Christ. But I always simply add back to them, ‘Yes true, but we can do both things.’ We can uphold that truth that any day is a great day when someone begins believing in Christ, but also we can have especially themed days or seasons about celebrating Christ’s importance in our lives. That is a good witness to others about how central our faith is to us-like praying in public! But I think also that the critics who discourage us from making a big deal out of Christ’s birth, they do make a point reminding us not to ‘put away’, box up or hide in a closet our faith in the newborn Jesus after this Christmas season ends. They are pointing out the same thing that people mean when they say we should not be only ‘Sunday Christians’ We should be all ‘week-long’ and ‘every-day’ Christians. We shouldn’t just act our best on Sunday, but then revert to bad habits and sins all week. If we do it on Sunday then we should enact the same good and righteous behavior all week long! So while we may stop singing Christmas carols today and we will take down our decorations after this weekend, it doesn’t mean we bring to an end our joyful reception of our child-King Jesus, our prince of peace. We don’t box up and put away our spirit of generosity and gratitude that comes from Him-our kind gift-giving and thoughtful remembrance of others who have less, or worse, nothing compared to ourselves. So, Christmas can be every day that we keep faith in Him and celebrate his birth and living among us. So while the decorations may disappear this week, and the songs we all know may stop, we are still just as excited about the baby Jesus God who humbled himself to be born like us, to live like us and even to die like us so that we can be saved!

But here’s a good question to honestly answer: Did all of our decorations get put away? I am always amazed at how every year, *somehow*, no matter how careful I think I am about boxing up, & putting away decorations (and do they

ever fit again into those same boxes-why do every year I have to get bigger box or more boxes to put away the Christmas decorations?) BUT somehow, I always miss decorations, and so they will hang around, on principle, through the rest of the year because I will not drag all of the boxes back out to just pack away the one Christmas hand-bell or pot holder or door wreath. But my convenient justification is that I leave that one ornament out to be a day to day reminder that Christmas is more than a season. Sounds good doesn't it? But really, I do know people who leave a small nativity scene out under their crucifix on a shelf-table, to show Jesus sanctified not only our exit from this life-death on cross, but also our entrance into this world.

And that brings us to today's feast of the Baptism of the Lord. We are just getting started! Baptism, just like Christmas, celebrates birth! We say, a second birth, a rebirth, being born again, and those phrases all indicate that when we enter Christ's life, we are committing ourselves to imitating Him in conduct and behavior (to follow him-to do as he does) and that we are talking about being born into His family-His likeness by grace. So baptism isn't an end game or final accomplishment that we then sit back on like a graduation saying, "Okay, I've done it now, its over!" No, baptism is just the beginning of our living in Christ. That is why when we enter this sanctuary every time we dip our hands in holy baptismal water and bless/mark ourselves to recommit to a more faithful following of Jesus. Baptism births us in Him, it gets us started, but every day we have to recommit ourselves to following & staying in Him. In Luke 9:23, Jesus tells His interested, newly-to-be-born faith family that "to be my disciple, a person must daily-(the key is daily) deny oneself and take up his/her cross" and when Jesus revealed the Lord's prayer to us, He taught us in Luke 11:3, to say "give us today our daily bread" He is commanding us to at least once daily recite-repeat His own prayer words and ask for bread-strength to be like Him again. So baptism is more than a day and more than a season too, it is a whole life, a new life in Christ, refreshed every time we recommit ourselves anew to being faithful to Him. That is why we Catholics remind ourselves so often about our one time baptisms that must become daily habits (second natures-truly!) of grace-filled actions and attitudes toward God and others. So in a moment we will renew our baptismal promises and be sprinkled with holy baptismal water as a gesture of daily recommitment to Christ. It all started with God claiming us at baptism as His own children. (Just as we heard the Father exemplify His Son Jesus- He set Him as a standard-model for all His children to follow. That was the Father's line about 'with whom I am well

pleased'. The Father is saying, "Strive to live like Him-Keep Him close to you always") I remember a kid saying to me once "If I am a child of God, I better start acting like it." That was so wise of him, but I do think there was a recent parent –child conference behind him telling that to me! But regardless, he got the point. We claim to be baptized children of God, and so that means that we have to pray asking God every day for the grace to live as He calls us to. We need Him. We return to that original grace given in baptism to start fresh and go at being a better disciple today than I was yesterday. It takes God's grace (we can't do it on our own) But God blesses us with it, not only in special seasons or only on Sundays, but every day we call upon Him, praying as He showed us to-which wasn't great that Jesus prayed after His baptism too. (I hope we didn't miss that detail- Isn't that a great example of Jesus for us too? The revelation of the Father's voice came while Jesus was praying AFTER his baptism-so After Christmas we still have to pray and act as we did before!) Baptism is more than a onetime moment; it is daily movement of our hearts in prayer to God, and a commitment to follow Him, where He leads: To act, behave and conduct ourselves as the beloved children of God that we are. Taking our baptisms seriously every day, is what pleases the Father and truly reflects our belonging in His Family.