

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

I mentioned last week about some people's New Year resolutions to learn something new every day (a good one). So, I wanted to share something I learned many a Christmases ago, when I was a seminarian. What happened back then, as that anytime seminary was on break, we seminarians would be in parishes (call it a residency training or a co-op experience-but not a coop because that was the seminary) But these experiences in parish were invaluable to teach us parish life and we helped out anyway we could. Well, over one Christmas, I was in a parish and the week before Christmas a wonderful family had mentioned that they wanted me to come to a party the day after Christmas at their home. They said, "We just mailed out invitations." So, "Great", I thought "that will be fun!" And the next day, I got an invitation in the mail, and here my drama began. Opening it, it said, "You are invited to 'so and so' (to protect the innocent) Boxing Party!" I thought "Oh, no what have I gotten into?" I mean I like & follow all sports like everyone; Super Bowl, I'm there or the world series/final four- you better believe I'm watching, a friend even got me into following the Stanley Cup-2019-when the STL Blues won! But Boxing? No, I can't do boxing. I know I am born in the home state of great Muhammed Ali, and I love Louisville, but after Tyson went to eating ears that sport lost me. So now what am I going to do? I am grateful, I know the company there is great, so I'll go & just ignore the TV screen. Then I mentioned my concern to the pastor and he started LAUGHING at me. He said, "You've never been to one before, it has nothing to do with fighting." Then began my education on Boxing Day as a British custom. It is Dec 26, the day after Christmas and it gives another reason to be festive and continue celebrating Christmas all over again. Dec 26 also happens to be St Stephen's Day (the early church deacon martyr & Acts tells us that the deacon's job was to oversee the food distribution (charity) to widows in the church). So for the Brits, St Stephen's Day is a traditional day of boxing up food and gifts and taking it to the streets to feed the poor and help the needy. To help others feast and enjoy the extended Christmas celebrations (this is all captured in the lyrics of the traditional Christmas carol 'Good King Wenceslaus'). So I really learned a lot that Christmas about British customs. (Later I realized that I wasn't too far off the truth connecting the day to real boxing, because it turns out that in Britain today, boxing day has become their version of Super Bowl- a big day of snacking, eating, and then snacking again, while watching soccer (and that stores sale are big that day kind of like Black Friday-day after thanksgiving is for

us). I know I'm exposing my biases about sports and violence, but British soccer fans are known to engage in tough sporting- more action in the stands fighting tan on the field- as the joke goes, of the guy on the street saying, 'Hey I went to a fight the other day and soccer game broke out'. So, what is first for them the game or the fight?

Well, I know about now, our big question is, 'Father, what does all that have to do with Baptism of the Lord?'

It's about Boxing Day - and that the Baptism of the Lord reminds us that Christmas doesn't end when the day or even season passes; No, when the decorations go away, then all the food of Christmas is boxed up not to be hidden in a closet but boxed to be delivered, given and shared in the streets. When Christmas seems to wind up, it is wound up to then, be set loose in mission to others (like the Wise Men taking the message back east or the shepherds going off announcing the message 'over the hills and everywhere'! When Christmas seems done, that is when its mission really gets started. This Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, coming on the tails of our Christmas season is a way of the Church saying that Christmas doesn't really end when the decorations get pulled down, boxed up and put away. All the grace, good and giving of Christmas doesn't get wrapped up and stashed away. No, Christmas and the fact that God was born among us, lived and dwelt with us, teaches that Christmas is every-day for those who have received Him. We are just getting going. Baptism marks our beginning with Christmas- our commissioning into his birth. Following Jesus, and baptism means our Christian living (all that Jesus modeled for us to do), it is being reborn in each of us.

So, is Christmas over? No, it is just getting started. Baptism begins our life- ***our living in Christ*** and letting Him (be born in us) give life to others through us. While we may box up our decorations and put them away, we don't box, close up and put away our faith for another year. No, we get to practicing it, taking it out and applying it to others. That is what baptism does; it is the giving, sharing, (like water) the pouring out and distributing (as St Stephen did) the grace of God to everyone. It only starts now. - Matt 28:19-20 "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, *teaching them* to observe all that I have commanded you."