

Baptism of the Lord, Year A
St. Mary's
Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7
Psalm 29:1-4, 9-10
Acts 10:34-38
Matthew 3:13-17
Sunday, January 13, 2008

Last week we celebrated the Epiphany of the Lord where Christ was made known to the Magi through the star. Today we celebrate an epiphany of another sort, the Baptism of the Lord.

His baptism is an epiphany because through it, Jesus' identity as the Son of God is made known.

Now, one might ask, as John the Baptist did, why should Jesus be baptized by John. John's baptism was for the forgiveness of sins and Jesus had no sins and Jesus is greater than John the Baptist so who is John to baptize him.

It is to be so because it is God's will. Jesus says "Allow it for now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus is not baptized by John for his own good but for us. Jesus' transforms baptism from only being for the forgiveness of sins to making us all adopted sons and daughters of Christ. For in Jesus' own baptism, God anoints him, sending the Holy Spirit down upon, and saying "This is my beloved son."

Most of us, because we are baptized as babies, don't remember our own baptism. I know I don't remember mine. So, it is hard for us to picture what effect baptism has on us because we don't remember anything before it or during it. While I don't remember my own baptism what do I remember are the children I have baptized, especially the first ones (a set of twins). It was definitely a grace filled moment for me. There is no question at all in my mind that God was active in that baptism.

Baptism does change things. In baptism, we are cleansed of original sin and any sins we have committed before our baptism. But it is more than that. As the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in his baptism, we all receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in the anointing at our baptism. We are given the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

In baptism, we become children of God, chosen by him, to be priests, prophets, and servants of the Lord. Our first reading today is from Isaiah 42 and is known as the first of four servant oracles in the Book of Isaiah. Each of the four speak of a servant of the Lord and what the servant will be like. Biblical Scholars question who the servant is. Ultimately, the prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus. But it is also lived out in the Israelites as a people. It is also possible that the servant of the Lord is an Old Testament figure. Lastly, some say the “servant” is each of us. We are all chosen by God and receive his spirit.

So many different interpretations of the identity of the servant as possible because it does not speak of details. For instance, it says the servant will bring *justice to the nations*. While we do it in different ways we are all called to help make sure everyone has their needs fulfilled. This is justice.

It says the servant will not cry and shout out. Sometimes the best way we help others is quietly.

It also speaks of the servant teaching. Jesus is the ultimate teaching, showing us, through the Holy Spirit, what is right and wrong. We all teach in some way. A parent teaches their child how to behave. A teacher teaches in school.

Sometimes we struggle to find happiness in the world. What makes me happy? We might think what makes us happy is money or fame but this is not who we are called to be.

God knows each of us. God was present when we were formed in the womb. God knew us before we knew ourselves. And God knows what gifts and in what combination he has given them to us.

The word “vocation” comes from the Latin word for “call” or “calling.” God gives us each a vocation where we will find fulfillment in our life. Beginning today we celebrate National Vocations Awareness Week. When we hear the term vocations many immediately think of priesthood and religious life. These are two particular vocations that we are in need of. Yet, to properly understand these, along with diaconate, as vocations, we must understand what I have said so far; that we are all called to serve God in some way. Perhaps in married love, or in parenting, teaching, or caring for others. There are many ways to serve the Lord if we open ourselves to the guidance of the spirit.

Having spoken about the vocation we all have I would now like to speak specifically of vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and religious life.

Most people are aware of how many fewer sisters there are today. You can ask some of the older generation here about the days when most all the teachers here were sisters. We also know there are fewer priests. It may seem with Fr. Rick, Fr. Mac, and I here that the numbers are getting better. But we are struggling. This weekend I am saying all the masses here because Fr. Mac is doing three masses in Corning to cover and Fr. Rick is doing a couple of Masses in Campbell. There is a shortage. Why?

Some want to blame it on celibacy or woman’s ordination issues and those are a factor but it is my understanding that some denominations with married clergy/women are still having shortages. How do we perceive priesthood or religious life?

Are we immediately turned off? Do we even consider it? If one of your children expressed an interest would you encourage them or discourage them? If not you or your children, then who?

Of course, it may not be your calling; God may intend you for marriage, raising children, or something else. But are you open to God's calling?

Do we just see the priesthood as a "Sunday job" or do we understand all that priests do besides say Mass? Do we see the witness value of religious life? Lay people can pretty much do all that religious can do but there is something to be said when a woman or a man is willing to dedicate themselves to God.

Lastly for those of you who believe you are not called to priesthood or religious life you can always be supportive of those who are. You can pray for vocations in your heart or using the bookmarks on the side tables. If you see someone you think you would make a good religious or priest, suggest it to them. You know I began feeling a call to the priesthood before anyone (besides God) said anything to be but I did not talk to ANYONE about it until someone told me they thought I should consider it. Most guys in seminarians say that someone suggested priesthood to them before they said anything themselves. So encourage others and pray for them.