

09 January 2022

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

When we have come to believe in the voices that call us worthless and unlovable, then success, popularity, and power are easily perceived as attractive solutions. The real trap, however, is self-rejection. As soon as someone accuses me or criticizes me, as soon as I am rejected, left alone, or abandoned, I find myself thinking, "Well, that proves once again that I am a nobody." ... [My dark side says,] I am no good... I deserve to be pushed aside, forgotten, rejected, and abandoned. Self-rejection is the greatest enemy of the spiritual life because it contradicts the sacred voice that calls us the "Beloved." Being the Beloved constitutes the core truth of our existence." - Henri J.M. Nouwen

As Christians our baptism joins us to Christ. We share in being named and claimed by God. When we forget our baptism, we forget who and whose we are. Many times we present ourselves that we belong to our family, our employer, our children's school or sports team, or the government of our country. Put in another, we reduce our identity to what we do, to what we earn and what we possess. I am my work. I am my possession. And so, we are proud to show our latest gadget or bag as if that shows your worth as a person. I remember a friend who showed me his latest and expensive cellphone to impress how he has arrived in his career. I was wondering if that was more a sign and symbol of his insecurities than his self-worth as a person. We are always tempted to show off whether talents or signs of wealth. We measure ourselves with the rich and the famous; we identify our worth with what others have and pretend to have. What is the impact of comparing yourself with others? The false expectation is that you belong to their social class marked by the good life and privileges accessible to the powerful and the rich. Yet the feeling is temporary because there is no end when one desires to have more luxury and entitlements in life. The reality is there is never enough for one's greed. There is never enough for one's covetous heart.

Pope Francis said: "Whenever material things, money, worldliness, become the center of our lives, they take hold of us, they possess us; we lose our very identity as human beings. When materialism takes over, we "end up becoming self-absorbed and finding security in material things which ultimately rob us of our face, our human face. The human person is made in the image and likeness of God, not in the image and likeness of material objects, not in that of idols!" Too much concern for material things can lead us to "lose the memory of God."

As Christians we reject all these claims of ownership; we belong to God. It is about God's purposes, and through our baptism we no longer live for ourselves, we now live to, for and with God. Our gospel reading speaks to the power of a father's affirmation. When Jesus was baptized, he heard the voice of God: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." A powerful affirmation from God of claiming Jesus as his Son. A powerful affirmation of his identity and purpose in life.

And through this affirmation Jesus knew who he was, and he was ready to go out with confidence and boldly embody the love of God, and proclaim the kingdom of God's rule to all people.

In baptism, we too are given this beautiful affirmation. We have received the greatest of all affirmations from our heavenly father through the waters of baptism. God says to us too, "You are my daughter and my son, my beloved. With you I am well pleased."

09 January 2022

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

Ronald Rolheiser says: "So much of our hunger is a hunger for blessing. So much of our aching is the ache to be blessed. So much of our sadness comes from the fact that nobody has ever taken delight and pleasure in us in a non-exploitive way. When has anyone ever made you the object of delight? When has anyone taken, in a non-exploitive way, delight in your body, your beauty, your intelligence, your person? When have you last felt that you are someone in whom others, and God, take pleasure and delight? Only a few, I suspect, move about in their daily lives with the joy, confidence and grace that comes from knowing that they are, as persons, good, beautiful and objects of delight. Depression is more the rule." When we claim our blessings, that we are blessed, that I am a blessing, I begin to make of my identity and sense of purpose. The second reading from the book of Acts states: "...beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with him." What comes after baptism and being anointed with the power of the Holy Spirit is Jesus' mission. He went doing good. Jesus began his public ministry guided by God's call to mission.

Our baptism too is a call to mission. We are not just baptized Christians and doing nothing. Living our baptism is to do good with and for others. From now on, we walk with Jesus as brothers and sisters called to change the world around us with the power of the Holy Spirit.