

12 January 2014

Today the Church celebrates the feast of the Baptism of Jesus. If ever there is a feast-day calling us to reflect on and deepen our understanding of Christian baptism, this is it! Because it is in baptism that we are made Christians, it is in baptism that we receive the gift of faith, it is in baptism that we become children of God and enter into the community of faith, it is through this wonderful sacrament that we receive the light of Jesus the risen Lord in order to be his disciples, it is in Baptism that we share in the life of God revealed to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a communion of life and love. So much comes to us in Baptism; so much flows from Baptism, the first sacrament of Christian initiation, the fountain and life-giving spring of grace for the Church.

I've often said that I don't remember half of what I was taught in the seminary. But some things I will never forget. Very early in my time at Corpus Christi College, a visiting Anglican priest was giving a lecture on the importance of 'Christian' baptism, not 'Catholic' baptism but Christian baptism. To our young non-ecumenical ears, the lecturer had to work hard to make the point. So I remember him walking around the lecture room waving his arms and saying, 'Baptism is baptism, is baptism, is baptism ...' Some of us started laughing so comical was the scene. But the point was made. The Anglican priest wanted a group of young Catholic trainee priests to come to a profound appreciation of the importance of Christian baptism and of this vocation in the life of the Church. He wanted us to appreciate that something profoundly significant and life-changing happens in the sacrament of baptism.

In today's readings, the theme of vocation is very strong. In today's first reading, the prophet Isaiah speaks of choosing someone in faith, filling them with his spirit, calling them to serve in the name of justice, to speak a word of freedom and hope. God calls us personally and intimately and he forms us to be people of light, a sign to the nations. In today's Gospel, Jesus comes to John in order to be baptized. This baptism reveals Jesus as chosen by God, entrusted with a mission, filled with the Spirit, manifested to the nations, a sign of hope and good news to all. The readings are talking about someone else; but they really are addressed to each of us, alerting us to remember and recall our own baptism, the God who calls us into relationship with him and with each

other as the Church, the God who entrusts us with a mission. It is no accident that the feast of the Baptism of Jesus concludes the Christmas and Epiphany cycle. The stories and songs about the baby Jesus are directed towards his mission and ours.

Whenever we celebrate a baptism here in this parish, something happens, something happens in the life of this new Christian. But something also happens to each of us; we are called to remember our own baptism, we are called to welcome with joy a new member of the faith community, we are all called to deepen our vocation as people of prayer, people of service, people of witness in our daily lives. As the years pass, I constantly remember the day of my baptism and give thanks to God for the wonderful gift of faith I received at Our Lady Help of Christians Parish, East Brunswick. Every time we touch the water of the baptismal font or are sprinkled with holy water, the grace of Baptism comes alive within us, it help us to remember a past event but is also calls us to live out this very day the implications of our baptism- called and chosen by God, filled with the light of Jesus, shaped by the power of the Holy Spirit, sent forth as people of justice, love and peace.

Today, let us remember with joy the day of our own baptism and the gift of faith each of us has received.