

19 January

Although we have entered ordinary time, the theme of today's readings looks remarkably like last week's feast of the Baptism of Jesus; called and chosen by God; called intimately by the God who formed us literally in our mother's womb to be his servant; set before the world as a sign to the nations; the figure of John the Baptist who is so central in our story of salvation, preparing the way, proclaiming Jesus as the Lamb of God who sets us free; that strong baptismal theme of the Spirit coming down upon Jesus and upon each of us in Baptism and Confirmation; called and consecrated as witnesses, sent forth with a mission to love, to serve and to heal. All this comes as the result of the grace of the sacrament of Baptism in our lives. If Baptism was important for Jesus, then surely it is just as important for each of us.

Just like last week, the theme of vocation is very strong in today's liturgy. For years, we always thought that vocation was a 'special' word reserved for those called to the priesthood and religious life. Thanks to the Second Vatican Council, the Church realised that vocation is a special word for all the baptized from which comes the specific call to serve in the priesthood and the religious life. It's not much use honouring the call to the priesthood and the religious if we do not honour that wonderful call which first comes to us in Baptism. We owe much to these remarkable insights of the Second Vatican Council which expand our vision of what the word vocation truly means in our lives.

Last week, Pope Francis announced that he was appointing a new batch of cardinals from around the world, nineteen in total. The pope's message was very clear. To be nominated a cardinal is not about a promotion, a great honour or decoration. It is the call to love more and to serve humbly. He wants the new cardinals 'to look further and to love the Church with greater intensity.' In the past, the nomination of new cardinals was accompanied by lavish receptions, expensive outfits and much worldliness. Pope Francis insists that the celebrations demonstrate a commitment to the evangelical spirit of austerity, sobriety and poverty. And he should know! When the present pope was nominated a cardinal in 2001, rather than order a new and expensive outfit, he had the robes of his predecessor simply altered to fit him. The

new pope doesn't simply 'talk' poverty and service. He actually practices what he preaches.

And in doing so, he is teaching the Church and the world that there is joy in the simplicity of life. We don't need to clutter our lives with expensive things and gadgets to make us happy. In fact, there is true joy in simplicity, in service, in loving and giving to others. Servant leadership demands that we are on the side of the poor, the broken and marginalised. We continue to pray for those who have lost homes and property due to bushfires. We pray for the victims of completely senseless violence on our streets and for their families. We pray for young people in particular who think that life is only enjoyable when they are totally drunk and high on drugs. Not only is this destructive behavior where we are all victims but it speak of a great spiritual poverty in people's lives.

Pope Francis reminds us that Christians are people of joy, people of hope, people of good news. The fact that we gather here to celebrate the Eucharist means that we are making a conscious choice to nourish our faith, to give something of ourselves for the life of this parish community, to serve others, to grow in our knowledge and love of God. Because that's the call that comes to us in Baptism – called and chosen by God to be a people of joy, a people of hope and a people of good news for our world.