

Gospel Verse
Sunday, January 11, 2009
Isaiah
(8:30 AM Mass)

The Baptism of the Lord

Today is Jesus' epiphany. It's Jesus' realization. It's Jesus' awareness. It's Jesus coming to know in a way that maybe he didn't know before. Even though he was born the Son of God, we are told that He grew in wisdom, age and grace — which means that 'He learned', just as we learn, because He was fully divine. But, He was also fully human. To be fully human means to have something grow on you, dawn on you, learn on you. The questions for us today are 'Can we learn what He learned?' 'Can we know what he knew?'

How do you know? You know by baptism. Today He is coming to be baptized. And there are two baptisms we're told today in the scriptures. There's the baptism of John and then there's another baptism. The baptism of John is the baptism of water. In that baptism of water, he is going to give you a human name and he's going to give you an instruction. And the instruction in the baptism of water is to wash away your sins, repent, turn around because there's another one coming with another baptism. But this baptism is not going to be like the baptism of water. You're going to get another name — a divine name. And this baptism will be the 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit'.

So John the Baptist is proclaiming, 'I can't even untie his shoe laces'. In these days the disciples followed the master and watched everything the master did down to the lacing and unlacing of his shoe laces. And John says, 'I can't even do that. All I can do is this — I'm going to baptize you with water. I'm going to tell you what I know. Here's what I know — You're to get your house in order. You're to turn around. You're to stop cheating and stealing and lying. You're to understand that you are a child of Abraham. And, to be a child of Abraham means that there are certain rules and laws that you are to obey. And the water that I'm pouring over you right now is a sign and symbol that you are to obey these laws. But, I can't do what He's going to do.'

What's he going to do? He's going to re-name you. But, we cannot be re-named until He is first renamed. That's the reason that Jesus submitted to the baptism at Jordan in the first place. He came from Nazareth. He knew who He was. He was the child of Mary and Joseph. Oh, he knew there was something special, but he didn't know what was special about him. He had heard all the stories around Him when He was a small child. But, He was a carpenter, a Jew, a man from Nazareth. He had been called out to the Jordan and He went under the waters of baptism and was given the name Yeshua. The name that the angels gave to Mary before he was born.

But, when he came out of the waters there would be another baptism. There was another baptism. And He knew something at this baptism that He didn't know from the first baptism. Because immediately as He came out of the waters, the heavens opened up and now the split between heaven and earth was torn asunder. There was no distance now between heaven and earth. And He saw the Spirit come down upon him like a dove. And He heard a voice from the skies cry out this — 'I've got a name for you. It's not Yeshua. He's not the boy from Nazareth. He's not the carpenter. Here's your name — Beloved Son. You are the Son of God.' And at this moment, Jesus has a radical epiphany — He's the Son of God!

The Son of God — what does that mean? What does it look like to be the Son of God? How does the Son of God act in this world where he finds himself placed? How does God walk around and act in the world? What does that mean? Well, he's got to discover that as well. He's got to learn that as well. He's got to learn when he goes out into the dessert for 40 days, fasting and being tempted by the devil, what real power is and what real power looks like. He's going to discover that. But, for right now, He knows his identity. And I tell you, once you know your identity, everything changes. He begins his public ministry now that he has his real name, his deepest name — He is the Son of God.

Now, the wonderful thing about this faith of ours, this Christianity of ours, is that where He is, we follow.

Whatever identity is given to Him, by adoption we are called and have as well. So we, too, have two baptisms. We have the first baptism where our parents brought us to the fountain and the water was poured over us and we were given a name, an identity. And we were given a culture and we became an i-n-d-i-v-i-d-u-a-l. A person becomes an individual by separation and comparison.

So, very shortly I learned that I was Italian. I couldn't miss it. I had a Roman nose! But, very shortly I learned that I was a boy and not a girl. And very shortly I learned that I could get away with a whole bunch of stuff if I could use my wit and humor. And I began to define myself. I began to have a sense of self concept. I began to understand who I was...a personality of who I think I am and the way I present myself to the world.

We spend the first half of our life creating an identity of our culture, our name, the way we live, of our grace, of our religion. And all those things make up our *external* identity. And then we spend the second half of our life protecting it because it's so weak. It's almost non-existent because it's all in our mind. It's all told to us. It's not the really 'real'. That's the identity that I present. It's called 'the egoic'. It's my ego. It's how I see myself. It's who I *think* I am. That's one of my identities.

But, there's another identity that is so much more profound. Now, the difficulty with this self- concept of mine is that it's just that — it's a self-concept. We're always worrying and trying to give our children self-esteem and self-concept because so often they feel they are not as good as... that the other kids are smarter than they are or better in sports. And they are always feeling inferior.

The difficulty with the egoic person, the outer person, the outer man/woman is that it's just 'outer'. It's just there. It's not bad - it's just not enough. Because I'm always playing catch up. I'm always feeling cheated on one hand. Or, I feel superior. I belong to Enron. I'm one of the smartest guys in the room. My name is Bernie Madoff. I can do whatever I want because I'm much more superior than you are. So either I'm superior or I'm inferior. And I'm never in the light. It's never enough. I'm always walking in the dark. I'm always afraid.

We live in a world that's filled with fear that's either not enough or too much. We just can't handle it. We're a people in the dark. And then we're told in Isaiah 'One is coming and He's not going to put you down'. He says, 'A bruised reed I will not break. A smoldering wick I will not quench'... until I establish justice, until I make it right. How do you make it right? Through the baptism of the Holy Spirit - By understanding who you really are.

On the 24th of April, about three score of our young people — our 13 and 14 year olds will stand before me in this church and we're going to cry out, 'Come Holy Ghost'. They were baptized in water when they were little babies and now we're going to pray for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit to come down upon them. I'm going to lay hands upon them and anoint them. But, we can't make this happen because it's already in there. They just don't know it. The goal that who we really are, our truest identity, is just covered up by so much crud. And all we have to do is get rid of the crud and then our truest identity begins to grow and blossom all by itself. On that day we're going to pray that we give enough of this 'crud' away that they can hear the heavens open up and the voice come down from heaven and say to them that day (and to you this day) -*You're my daughter. You're my son. You are my beloved.*

Now, when you know *that* in the core of your being, everything changes. The reason there's so much hatred right now in the war going on in Palestine and Israel is because they don't know *that* yet. They still think they are their culture, their outer person, their personalities, their tribes. When the whole world knows its truest identity, the light has dawned on us all. Justice has healed. The kingdom has come. *'You are my beloved'*.