

Pastor's Homily – Baptism of The Lord – January 13th 2019

So there was this guy who was stumbling through the woods, totally drunk. And he comes upon a preacher baptizing people in the river. The drunk man proceeds right into the water, subsequently bumping into the preacher. The preacher turns around and is almost overcome by the smell of alcohol, at which point he says to the drunkard, “Are you ready to find Jesus?” The drunk shouts, “Yes, I am.” So the preacher grabs him and dunks him into the water.

He pulls him back and says, “Brother, have you found Jesus?” The drunk replies, “No, I haven’t found Jesus!” The preacher, shocked at the answer, dunks him again, but for a little longer. He pulls him out of the water and says: “Have you found Jesus, brother?” The drunk answers, “No, I haven’t found Jesus!”

By this time, the preacher is *at his wits end* and dunks the drunk again. But this time holds him down for about 20 seconds. And when he begins kicking his arms and legs, he pulls him up. Finally, the preacher again says to the drunk man: “For the love of God, have you found Jesus?”

The drunkard staggers upright, wipes his eyes, coughs up some water, catches his breath, and says to the preacher, “Are you sure **THIS** is where he fell in?”

Are you ready to find Jesus? That’s a good question for the beginning of a new year. That’s the right question too for the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. And yet – the response of the drunk guy is also appropriate – “are you sure THIS is the right spot?” [Are you sure you’re on the right track?]

What if you knew absolutely for a fact that God is calling you to do something? Would you do it? If you’re a believer, of course you would. The hitch lies somewhere in the terrain of knowing “absolutely for a fact.” First, you’d have to know for sure it’s God who’s calling – not some manifestation of guilt or righteous indignation or human sympathy, but really and truly God.

Next, you’d have to be convinced that God is asking you to do precisely this “something” — not as a metaphor, not as a nudge in a particular direction, but exactly this thing! None of us wants to wind up like Francis of Assisi, rebuilding the San Damiano church stone by agonizing stone, only to discover that God wants you to rebuild the church spiritually, not physically. Oh!

So, when we get the ultimate Caller is on the line concerning the ultimate mission, we want an identity check, and a mission clarification. “Are you sure you lost him here” – the drunk man says. So – we need routine clarification for our mission in life and maybe one more thing, to be honest. We don’t want it to be too hard. We don’t want this “calling” to take up too much time. Because life is short, most of us have plans, even if we find ourselves “stumbling through the woods” in some sort of stupor at times.

Did Jesus have plans for his life? Plans that didn’t involve wandering around Palestine with 12 unperceptive men for (3) three years; healing a lot of people — some of whom forget to say thank you; telling parables and stories nobody would get; and being executed horribly at the end of it all? Did Jesus ever dream of waking up in his own bed, in his own home, with his own family?

If he was as human as we are, (*like us in all things, but sin*) it’s hard to imagine he never had such thoughts. Through his prayers in the Garden at Gethsemane, we actually get to overhear his plea bargain for a different plan! But Jesus takes his call as “beloved Son” seriously. He might wish for other things, but he only wills what God wills.

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Jesus shapes his will to the divine will in every circumstance. So maybe he's tired — but the crowds look like “lost sheep,” so he teaches them. He perceives his mission as being “for the sake of Israel,” — but when He's finds himself in the other territories, he ministers there too. On the cross, Jesus feels personally forsaken — but when a dying thief makes a profession of faith, Jesus offers him paradise.

Some of us think of vocation discernment as what those few kids who wind up as nuns or priests or religious brothers have to do. Everybody else can get on with their lives. But God calls all of us in Baptism. There's a divine purpose nested in every heart here. If we don't hear it, maybe it's time to check our messages. “Beloved son, beloved daughter,” God is on the line.

My anniversary into Holy Orders as a deacon falls on this weekend of The Baptism of the Lord. My question then (38 years ago) was – “Are you sure this is where I'm supposed to “fall in” and find Jesus? The answer then was – “YES.” I just had to TRUST that God has a plan for me, as he did for Jesus, and, as He does for you.

So, what can we take away from today's celebration of the Baptism of the Lord? First, we can celebrate the reality that our baptism links us to Jesus and to all who have gone before us in faith. At a time when legal papers have become so important for determining status, we can claim our baptismal certificate as our principal identity card. It tells us to whom we belong and to what we are called.

Jesus' response to his baptism reminds us that the ceremony is but one tiny moment, the meaning of which is determined by how we live it out day by day. Observing him, we realize that baptism doesn't give us a status but a **mission**. To discern that mission, we too must pray and listen to the Scriptures. So, the preacher's question is always relevant – “Have you found Jesus?”

Our baptism is all about “finding Jesus.” Finding Jesus in the here and now (wherever HE happens to fall in) – and we plunge into His life and mission, trying to follow, so that, like him, we too may be “found” WELL-PLEASING” to God.

So – have you found Jesus?

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