



National Vocation Awareness Week
January 9-14, 2012

Homily Notes

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord
Year B

READINGS

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

The Lord places his servant before us and God is well pleased. The Savior will be filled with God's spirit, bringing justice and light to the nations.

Psalms 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10

The Lord will bless his people with peace.

Acts 10:34-38

Peter tells the house of Cornelius of Christ; that Christ is God's anointed.

Mark 1:7-11

Jesus is baptized by John in the Jordan, and the Spirit, like a dove, descends upon him. A voice from the heavens proclaims: "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased."

Connections for National Vocations Awareness Week

The feast of the Baptism of the Lord brings to a close our celebration of Christmas and focuses on the messianic role of Jesus. In the waters of the Jordan, Jesus is baptized and named God's beloved son with whom he is well pleased. Isaiah speaks of the messiah in this way: he will bring forth justice, and be so gentle that not even a bruised reed shall break. The Savior will be a covenant for the people and a light to the nations. In short, Jesus' life and ministry will bring about the kingdom of God.

In a manner of speaking, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord serves as more than an act of closure regarding the Church's celebration of the incarnation. It also serves as a springboard into Jesus' self-understanding and, ultimately, the fulfillment of his vocation. Further, the celebration of Jesus' baptism also invites all disciples to remember their baptism and their vocation to follow Jesus, the light of the nations. As Dianne Bergant notes:

"Through baptism Christians share in the prophetic and divine ministry of Christ. They too receive an imperative with baptism, an imperative of committed service to the poor and to the cause of compassion. The feast of the Baptism of the Lord is a reminder of the call to Christian service."¹

What are we to make of the Baptism of the Lord? Ordinarily, today should be the First Sunday of Ordinary Time, but that is suppressed with the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Technically, the

¹Dianne Bergant. *Preaching the New Lectionary Year B*. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press), 1999, 83.
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season of Christmas came to a close at Sundown on Saturday of this weekend. It is such a strange celebration. On the one hand, the Church concludes its celebration of the season of Christmas just prior to this celebration. In some Churches the Christmas decorations are still up and all of our music reflects themes of Christ's birth and baptism. On the other hand, in many Churches the decorations have already been packed away and the music of the day is far from related to the mystery of the incarnation. So, what are we to make of the Baptism of the Lord?

The Baptism of the Lord is a confusing day and it is a day of multiple meaning. It is confusing in that it is a bridge from the season of Christmas in Church but not in the world to the Ordinary Time of Winter. It is a day of multiple meaning in that it is a day about Jesus and a day about us. The Baptism of the Lord commemorates an important event in the life of Jesus and it is a day that reminds us of who we are called to be in relationship with God. Let's start with Jesus.

The celebration of Jesus' baptism is ultimately the fulfillment of his vocation. When Jesus enters the waters of the Jordan, he is for the readers of the Gospel and the community of his time, the son of a carpenter. He was thirty and still lived at home. Upon coming out of the waters of the Jordan, Jesus—in his own eyes and in ours—is different. In baptism, Jesus' relationship with God is clearly articulated and accepted. The voice of God proclaims Jesus is God's Son with whom God is well-pleased.

Don't we all long to hear God say: "You are my beloved child, with whom I am well pleased?" I know I do. In fact, the dream of knowing that we please God is one of the deepest human desires. But how do we do that? How do we please God? Today's gospel passage gives us a place to start. Pleasing God involves the acceptance of his love and of our baptismal call. In the waters of baptism Jesus embraces his relationship with God; he hears in a new way that he is God's Son. Jesus also accepts his call. While not spelled out in the text, Jesus knows as God's Son he is to bring the good news of salvation to the world. He welcomes his role to draw others to the Father and begins to live his call upon leaving the Jordan.

Indeed, Jesus' baptism is a model for us. In his baptism we witness an example of how every Christian is to live their vocation. Jesus accepts God's love and strives to live that love everyday. Jesus does that in his teaching, his preaching, his healing and, ultimately, in his suffering, death, and resurrection. Everyday Jesus tried to please God by living up to and into his call.

Now what about us? We were claimed by God in the waters of baptism as God's beloved children. Each of us has been given a call to live a life that will be pleasing to God and fill us with a deep and abiding joy. And there are different calls for different people. Some are called to married life; to commit themselves to God and one other person. Married people promise to be living examples of love for the world, especially through the blessing of children and family. Some are called to the single life and witness to God's love present in every walk of life. Others are called to religious life as sisters, brothers, monks and nuns. Still others are called to service as deacons and priests.

Brothers and sisters, today we begin our celebration of *National Vocations Awareness Week*. For the next week we are asked to pray for vocations: that people will open their hearts to God's call and respond freely and fully. Let's do that. As a community of faith, let each of us promise in the week ahead to pray that Christians everywhere will renew their baptismal commitment to follow Jesus, as married or single persons, as religious sisters and brothers or monks and nuns, as deacons and as priests. Let us pray that people will live their lives as God calls them. In particular, let us ask God to open the hearts of many men and women so they may hear the happiness to which they are called through service to the Church as its vowed religious, deacons and priests. Let us pray that each of us, in our full response to God's call, may, like Jesus, hear God say: "You are my beloved, with whom I am well pleased!"

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