

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord – January 9, 10, 2016

First Reading: Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

Second Reading: Titus 2:11-14; 3,4-7

Gospel: Luke 3:15-16, 21-22

The scripture readings today are rich in images of immense love - beginning with Isaiah. “Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God, Speak tenderly to Jerusalem.” Isaiah continues with a “voice crying out in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord” - then presents us with more images of tenderness and caring.

Paul’s letter to Titus begins with one word: “Beloved”. Like his letters to Timothy, this letter is personal – sent to one person and not a community. Paul continues - telling us that God our Saviour saved us, not because of any great works of our own – but “through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit”.

In Luke’s Gospel we hear how people are filled with expectation as they approach John who has come out of the wilderness. This man who emerged from the desert, dressed in skins - when he spoke the people listened. And he knew that another would follow him and baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire. Anne Osdieck suggests that John the Baptist “was a middleman. He pointed back to Isaiah and forward to Jesus, connecting the whole plan.” Anne asks “What or who are the middlemen or middle women who connect us with God?

Pause “In what way are we a middle person?” **Pause**

Then Jesus came along – our Messiah submitted himself to be baptised first by John, and then by the Holy Spirit who came upon him. In the alternate Gospel reading for today which is from Matthew it reads similar to this account from Luke but there is a difference. Matthew writes it as God speaking to the crowds – for he says “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” But as we just heard proclaimed - Luke records it as God saying “YOU are my Son, the Beloved; with YOU I am well pleased.” Intensely and intentionally personal. Imagine what it is like to be praised by God – ‘you are my son, you are my daughter – Beloved – I take pleasure in you’. **Pause** –

We are taught that “in the life of each of us there are certain definite stages, certain milestones from which our life takes direction.” So it was with Jesus with the first milestone of his life being his visit to the temple when he was 12. The next milestone was when Jesus met John almost 18 years later. William

Barclay suggests that during those years Jesus must have been coming to a realisation of his own uniqueness. He waited for a sign and that sign was John the Baptist emerging from the desert in what Barclay called a “movement towards God”. “For Jesus the emergence of John was God’s call to action and his first step was to identify himself with the people in their search for God. He did this by submitting himself to John for baptism.”

In the moment of Jesus’ baptism God spoke to him. It was a personal experience. With the words of God Jesus realised and KNEW that he was God’s anointed one and that this involved not power and glory, but suffering and a Cross. The cross did not come as a big surprise to Jesus; from the first moment of realization he saw it ahead. Barclay maintains that “the baptism shows us Jesus asking for God’s approval and receiving the destiny of the cross.

Ron Rolheiser in his article “Baptism As The Conscriptive Rope” says that to be baptised into the church is to be a consecrated, displaced person. Baptism consecrates us and consecration is a rope that takes us to where we would rather not go, namely, into the suffering that produces maturity. Love”, he says, “is baptismal. Immediately upon confessing it, our freedom is derailed and painful though it may be, we are taken by conscription into maturity.” – Just as Jesus was in the Gospel.

“To consecrate” he says, “means to set aside, to displace from ordinary usage, to derail from normalcy. Long before this has to do with sacred buildings, altars, chalices and vowed religious, it is descriptive of something within ordinary life.” Baptism – our consecration.

Jesus called the Beloved, has become bound in love – both the joy and the suffering – the Cross and the Resurrection. He is lavished with love – Beloved.

We are a chosen people, a consecrated people through Baptism. We belong, if you will, to God and as Paul wrote to Titus; “This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

I’d like to finish with this short prayer:

Lord,
rain the Holy Spirit down upon us:
over our shoulders, down on our heads, hands, feet.

Drench our hearts.

Your lavish love
and your pouring the Spirit upon us
has made us wealthy
beyond telling.

Please - be our continued guest.

Invited guest and energizer of our lives
call us to be, through God's love,
transformed into men and women, boys and girls
who love deeply, act justly and walk humbly with our God.

Resources:

Anne Osdieck – *Reflections & Discussion Questions* – St. Lois University Reflections on the Baptism of the Lord
Ron Rolheiser, OMI – *Baptism As The Conscriptive Rope* - 1998
William Barclay – The New Daily Study Bible – *The Gospel of Luke*