

Baptism

January 9, 2022, Baptism of the Lord

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

Fr. Brad

Richard Rohr has a beautiful statement about the symbolism of our Baptism.

'Baptism, our initiation into the new family of God, is everything all at once symbolized and celebrated. It takes the rest of our lives to understand it, to suffer it, and to (make it our own)...the reality must be lived first, and only then spoken about. The Christian life is a matter of becoming who we really are.'

There are many ideas about what baptism is and what it is not.

Our baptism is not about forming a club of the baptised. That is not what Christianity is or what our Catholic faith is about.

Our baptism is intended to inaugurate a new and deeper way of living that leads us to participate in the mission of Christ - - to reach out to those who need forgiveness, encouragement and new hope - - something we received ourselves in having heard the message of the Gospel. That reality is not unpacked overnight but rather over the course of an entire lifetime. On the day of our baptism, that realization is not magically bestowed. It needs to be unpacked and nurtured. That's why in the Church, there is usually a preparatory process leading up to the actual celebration of the sacrament and then follow up sacraments that inaugurate other stages of the Christian life.

We probably all know intellectually that Baptism is a beginning and not an end in itself. However, for many reasons, the reality of it can easily become part of the furniture for many, and never be deeply pondered. Many people forgot they were ever baptised or just acknowledge it as something one went through as an infant or a young child which they barely remember and don't have a real conscious connection with its implications for their lives. Some may eventually experience something in life like the loss of a loved one and re-examine their faith and what their baptism is really about. Others may, out of curiosity, look more deeply into the meaning of baptism and what the catechism teaches about it.

Through our baptism, we share a common relationship with Jesus in which the old divisions and labels simply no longer apply.

We have been baptised into a cause, not a small factional interest cause, but **the very cause of humanity**. We have been commissioned to participate in the work of Jesus. It is both a privilege and a duty. We were chosen. Our baptism lines us up with a vocation. It is not a job. It is a way of living, a way of approach to our jobs, to our family lives. Through this inauguration, we receive the good news proclaimed in the first reading from Isaiah.

In the second reading from Paul's letter to Titus, we hear of what is entailed in our baptismal commitment. Self-control, upright and godly behaviour, gentleness, patience. It might serve us well to review the fruits of the Holy Spirit and take note of how well or not well those fruits are present and manifested within us in our daily lives. To renounce impiety and worldly passions makes room for the grace of God to work in our lives and moves us forward on the path of spiritual maturity. We are all triggered by the world and tempted to impulsively respond without allowing the Spirit to lead us.

It is awfully hard to live in spirit and in truth if we don't know who we are. And so the journey of self discovery is ongoing. When we look at the episode in our Gospel, we see that something is being revealed. There is debate over what actually happened and who heard what. The important thing here is that Jesus was somehow affirmed in his relationship with God. Jesus knew himself. He had been preparing yet this event perhaps would deepen his identity, his resolve and inaugurate the next level of his mission - - his public ministry - - and further reveal his relationship with God. Who heard or experienced this revelation at this time is a perennial question. We do know that the experience was, for Jesus, a prompting that would lead in into the desert to unpack what had just happened.

In our own lives, perhaps we can reflect back on experiences that affirmed us and set us on a particular path in life. Events in our lives such as suddenly gaining a deeper insight into what our talents and gifts really are, or who we should call friend; it could be in the meeting our spouse for the first time, being offered a particular career opportunity, having a faith experience that we could no longer deny.

We enter this world with all the innocence of an infant. Yet very quickly, we have to learn how to discern right from wrong, both at a practical level and at a moral and ethical level. The world seems to be good at teaching us the practical things. The moral and ethical choices, they are a little bit more elusive and require more than just knowledge and education. A sound formation of conscience and good role modelling help nurture a moral aptitude. Yet true wisdom ultimately comes from above.

Christ came into the world to shed light on what it truly means to be human. And we are still learning what that means even though we call ourselves human beings. The world can lead us down a very dehumanizing path and we need to recognize that when we relegate the importance of morality and ethical response, when we remove this dimension from our conscious decision-making, we head down a desensitizing path that ultimately leads to a lie. *Those who know the difference between a lie and the truth are ones who will help save humanity.* Bill Moyers

The ways of Jesus are countercultural to the self-interested ways of the world. The world needs these countercultural ways in order for humanity to survive.

To be filled with the Spirit may be inaugurated at baptism but really begins with our opening our hearts to the love and compassion of Jesus and disciplining ourselves in His ways. This requires prayer and discernment, the nurturing of grateful hearts and sensitising ourselves to the needs of others. And it is a process. We are all still sinners but baptism represents a starting over in a new direction equipped with the grace to persevere as Jesus did.

Jesus would have to grapple with all of these things in the desert but He knew with full confidence that he had the love and endorsement of God the Father above. What could be a better start to a mission than that? Imagine accepting the reality that we are God's beloved and that he is pleased with us.

So as we reflect on our own mission in life, may we continue to learn to receive instruction about life from a deeper place than the world itself offers.