

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

January 9, 2005

Is 42:1-4, 6-7

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

Acts 10:34-38

Mt 3:13-17

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There was a popular movie out not too long ago called *Finding Nemo*. One scene in it was when Nemo, a young clown fish, ends up in someone's aquarium. As the "new fish on the block," he had to prove himself worthy of living in the tank with the other community of fishes. To do so, during his first night, he was awakened by the other fishes and told that he had to go through the ritual that would initiate him into the group. This ritual required him to have the strength and courage to pass through a difficult part of the tank that had a strong current and forceful air bubbles. Determined to be a member of the group, he collected himself, thrust himself forward, went through the strong waters and successfully passed the test.

Once he proved himself worthy to be in the group, things changed for him. He became part of a team that worked together, helped each other, and sought ways to protect each other. He became a new member of the community and with that came responsibilities.

This whole idea of passing through a ritual, having things change in one's life and taking on new responsibilities is at the heart of today's readings and what we celebrate today. We celebrate the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by John. This ritual of baptism was performed by John so that people could repent from their sinful ways. When Jesus approached John for baptism, John initially refused to baptize Him because he felt unworthy and also because Jesus should have been the one baptizing him. Jesus insisted upon John baptizing Him to fulfill all righteousness.

Some people often ask the question: why was Jesus baptized if He had never sinned? This is true to say that Jesus never sinned; therefore, He was not in need of baptism for the forgiveness of sin. The reason why Jesus chose to be baptized was to signify His union with the sinfulness of humanity and for whom He came to redeem from such sin.

When Jesus came out of the waters of baptism, things changed in His life. His baptism became the beginning of His public ministry. It also showed how close of a relationship God had with Him as expressed in the words: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Jesus became an example to all of us of how to be in the right relationship with God by always doing what was righteous for the sake of building up the kingdom.

How can we apply the baptism of Jesus and His close relationship to God the Father to our own lives? By nature of our own baptism, we died to our old sinful ways

and have risen to new life in Christ Jesus. In passing through this ritual, our lives have changed and with it have come new Christian responsibilities. The first and second readings tell us what these new ways are. We are called to imitate the example of Jesus by doing God's will everyday in our lives and by using the grace that He gives us daily to help build up the kingdom. When we use the graces that He gives us, this pleases Him. God gives us these graces to act justly and when we do this we are letting the light of God that dwells in us shine for all to see. Just as God gave Jesus the power to go out and spread His love in the world, so too does He give us the same spirit to do good in the world.

We are called to spend time in daily prayer to discern how we can best live out our baptismal commitment. Maybe we have the grace of being a good team worker and feel called to help out at the local food pantry for the poor? Maybe we have the grace of working with the elderly and feel called to visit the older parishioners who live alone? Maybe we have the grace of devotional prayer and are called to attend daily Mass? How serious do we accept our baptism, especially since most of us were baptized as infants? Whatever the case may be, we are called to look deep into our hearts to see how God is asking us to use His grace in this world.

As we do our best to live out our gift of baptism, there are signs that we can look for to help us to know if what we're doing is in fact the will of God. The psalm tells us that we will know that what we are doing is in fact the will of God because He will bless us with a sense of peace and harmony in our lives. Let the peace of God that we experience be our guide in life as we discern God's will for us.

Just as Nemo went through his ritual in the aquarium and Jesus entered the ritual waters of baptism to both begin a new part of their lives, so too are we called to reflect upon the impact of our own baptism every day. Let us rise to new life in Jesus Christ as we use God's grace to help to build up the kingdom of God on earth.