

The Baptism of the Lord

Year A

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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“Reflections for Ordinary Times”

Today we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord even as we return to the ordinary movements of ordinary time. As the days slowly grow brighter, we continue to hope that we will remain faithful to our New Year’s resolutions as we look forward to the new life offered by spring. New life is what we celebrate this day. In baptism we celebrate new life in Christ and a bond of relationship that, if we truly believe St. Paul, can never be broken. We celebrate the reality of being forever one with Christ.

In the ordinariness of this moment, perhaps now is the time to pause and reflect upon those beliefs which bind us together, those promises made at our own baptism, that profession of faith we ritualistically make each week – and perhaps take for granted? In the ordinariness of everyday life, what does it mean to be a baptized

follower of Christ? I won't be so presumptuous as to offer any answers. I simply offer questions for reflection, questions which I hope will, this day, lead us to further opening our minds and hearts to the God who calls us together.

Do you reject sin so as to live in the freedom of God's children?

To live in God's freedom necessitates a rejection of sin. It means that we are called to live the vocation of becoming more fully human while refusing to restrict the right of other human beings to become more fully human also, with all the spiritual and socio-political implications that go along with that. Do I treat employees and co-workers with respect and advocate for fair wages and working practices? Do I defend the right to life for all persons, at all stages of life? Do I look at fellow human beings as creations of God and as brothers and sisters in Christ? Do I truly treat other people – especially those in social positions lower than my own – the way I wish to be treated? (As a comic once said, “People who are mean to waiters are just plain mean.”) In Jesus' own words, do I say yes when I mean yes and no when I mean no?

Do you reject the glamour of evil and refuse to be mastered by sin?

This one can be a little harder. Most of us, I dare say, would say that we are most certainly not mastered by sin. Yet, how many of us are mastered by the environment we have created for ourselves? Do we really have control over our lives or have we become mastered

by a consumer culture which demands that we take more care of our possessions and our images of ourselves than the reality of our human selves stripped of the finery with which we mask our true identity? Augustine said that what we possess in excess is, in reality, the property of those who go without the basic necessities of life. Who among us can honestly say that we do not "own" that which belongs to the poor, the oppressed, the weakest members of the human family? What constructive critiques might we need to engage in and what changes might we achieve both individually and as a Christ centred community of faith?

Do you reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness?

On a Hollywood level, one would have to be incredibly foolish to do anything other than reject Satan. If pop culture teaches us anything, it is that those who make pacts with the devil, always end up on the losing end of the proposition, yet are remarkably surprised when the evil one shows up to claim their souls. In our daily lives, however, the rejection is, perhaps, more subtle, involving those mundane decisions which either support or reject the development of human life. Satan's temptations often come in those simple justifications for actions and attitudes that we know are contrary to God's will. How often do we say "Well, what could I do about it anyway?" or "It's not like I'm killing someone. There are much worse things in comparison!"? Do the things we say and do make us more, or less, fully human?

Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven

and earth?

To believe in God goes beyond acknowledging that he exists and acts in this world. To believe in God is to TRUST in God. It is to trust he is always there, no matter what, even when we can not readily see or feel his presence. It is to trust that his will is always and everywhere in our best interest, even if we can not see or understand that will. It is to trust that God makes himself present in every element of creation, in human relations, in the gift of the world we inhabit, in the mystery of life itself, as well as in the ordinary movements of everyday life. It also, I dare say, implies a desire to believe in yourself and your own inherent goodness as a creation of God. Do you believe?

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?

Where I live now, belief in God, let alone belief in the Triune God, is certainly "out of fashion." Antagonistic atheism, as opposed to say the intellectual atheism of Marx or Freud, is all the rage in the U.K. literary scene and media. To believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, let alone that he was born of the Virgin, and then act upon that belief marks you as a "nutter," to quote ex-prime minister Tony Blair as he explained why he did not convert to Catholicism while in office. Yet, we as Catholics must believe in Jesus Christ. How could we not? The question lies in how we live this belief. Our baptismal promises, I would argue, make it incumbent upon us to live our belief in the risen Christ through the way we relate to his brothers and sisters who are here in the space of this very ordinary time. If we

believe in Jesus, if we TRUST that Jesus' call for us to be not only disciples but his siblings is real, then we must allow that faith to guide us in all we say, in all we do, in every area of our lives. It calls for the destruction of those false walls which divide us, those personal and social sins which prevent us from living our common call to become more fully human. Do you believe?

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting?

It is the Holy Spirit sent by Christ who desires to lead us and guide us in all we say and do. Do we allow the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts? Do we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us as we make our everyday decisions, decisions which either help build up or tear down the Kingdom of God? In our everyday life, where do we see, hear, or feel the Spirit moving? Do we take the time to be still enough to allow the Spirit into our lives? Do we take the time to learn from the wisdom, the successes, and the mistakes of the saints – canonized or not – who have gone before us? Do we trust that we can be forgiven for our sins and that we have been given the strength to forgive others when they sin against God and ourselves? Do we trust that this life is NOT all there is; that there is indeed a life beyond ordinary time?

I said that I would not offer any answers. I won't, but we as a community already have offered one collective answer. That answer is simply, "yes, we believe." In the quiet of this moment, in the daily movements of our time, let us be continually reminded of our

vocation to become more fully human, more fully one with the Triune God and each other. Let us trust in the one and only God who calls us to believe in him, who calls us to a fully human life in him, who desires each and every one of us to enjoy everlasting life. Let us celebrate, every day, our own Baptism into the Body of Christ.