

THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD “A”

JANUARY 11/12, 2020

“Gender Reveal” celebrations have burst on the scene over the past few years. Hosted by parents to “reveal” the gender of their pre-born child after it has been medically established they range from the simple to the elaborate complete with pyrotechnic displays. A whole industry has grown up surrounding these “Gender Reveal” celebrations. One site I checked offers at least 450 different forms the gathering can take. The same Google search revealed that Amazon, Wal-Mart, Target and other retailers stand ready to supply everything needed for the big day.

Today’s celebration of the Baptism of the Lord can be viewed through the lens of a “Gender Reveal” celebration. However, in Jesus’ case it is not about a revelation prior to his birth, but a revelation of his person and mission at the beginning of his public life. The setting is Jesus’ arrival at the Jordan River to be baptized by John. This ritual moment is filled with great significance. First, in insisting that John baptize him with his baptism of repentance, Jesus the sinless eternal Son of God, immersing himself in the waters of the Jordan freely chooses total identification with our sinful human condition; its temptations, trials, sufferings, and ultimately physical death inherited from Adam and Eve. Second, Jesus’ baptism is the occasion for the revelation of Jesus’ identity and mission received from the Father: *This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased* (Mt.3:17). The Holy Spirit the bond of love and unity between the Father and Jesus hovers over Jesus in the form of a dove. This “Gender Reveal” moment no earthly celebration can equal!

In the Father’s statement revealing Jesus as *my beloved Son* more is being proclaimed than biological or theological relationship. The title *Son* in the original Greek can also be translated *Servant*. The first reading from Isaiah spells out just in what being the *Son/Servant* consists. Jesus’ mission is to bring “justice to the nations”—affirming and advocating for the equality and dignity of all men and women as God’s sons and daughters. A special focus of Jesus, the Gospels, and subsequently the Church are those whose dignity and human rights are so often ignored or violated by the power-brokers in the world, those relegated as Pope Francis continually reminds us, to the peripheries of society. In carrying out his mission the *Son/Servant* will not use words, actions, or weapons of violence. Instead, he is one who exercises his mission

not *crying out or shouting* ... who does not *break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick* (Is.42:1-4,6-7). He comes as a healer, not a military or political conquerer, with his gifts of divine forgiveness, *sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, letting the oppressed go free*. In today's second reading Peter, in his sermon in the house of the newly converted Gentile convert Cornelius, states the universal nature of the person and mission of Jesus: *God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him* (AA10:34,35). Jesus' life and mission are gift, grace, to everyone. No one of us should feel or believe that we "hopeless cases" outside of the care, concern and love of God for us in Jesus.

Beginning tomorrow, we enter, until the beginning of Lent, the Church season known as Ordinary Time. The mystery of the incarnation which Christmas celebrates and concludes today, is not simply about a baby, is more than just a beautiful manger scene with adoring shepherd and mysterious kings. Most of Jesus' life until his baptism was lived in "ordinary time", occupied with the tasks of everyday living; working as a carpenter, eating meals with his family, praying in the synagogue, making pilgrimages to worship in the temple in Jerusalem. Beginning tomorrow, we are invited to integrate what we have celebrated and experienced through all of these celebrations into our daily life, our "ordinary time."

Today's feast is an opportune moment for all of us to recall the dignity of our baptism. Baptism is the sacramental beginning of a life of missionary discipleship and the doorway to all the sacraments. Baptism was our "reveal" moment: passing through its waters; sin forgiven; anointed by the Holy Spirit as "priest, prophet and king; assuming our own "belovedness" as a daughter or son of the living God. How is God calling each of us anew to live out this belovedness in our daily service to each other?

12 January, 2020
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