

Stirring the Sugar You've Got

Sunday, January 10, 2010

Baptism of Our Lord

Luke 3:15 As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah 16 John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with e the Holy Spirit and fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

18 So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

...

21 Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, 22 and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Stirring the Sugar You've Got
Pastor Krewson

I must make a confession...

I sit in a corner office with two windows
And this week there was, well, there was something happening outside
those windows...directly across the street the university has been
demolishing ??? residence hall.
All week I've heard the rumbling of construction vehicles
And the occasionally, I peaked out my window
To watch this massive wrecking ball - actually more like a
wrecking fork - hoisted, and then dropped, To topple brick, and concrete and steel, as if it
were a sand castle being kicked over by some youngsters...
It has been an impressive demolition...

So, I confess - In my corner office, it has not been a very productive week!

Who can blame me for taking it in?

Joggers were stopping in their tracks...Cars were stopping
Trucks were stopping
Police officer even stopped
Moms and dads were pulling over in their SUVs and minivans to
watch, And pointing - some even taking pictures
Crowds gathered regularly to witness this massive reconstruction project
Today in the gospel reading, we have a
Crowd gathered in the desert - to see a reconstruction project of a different
kind
John the Baptist - Talking about a baptism of repentance
Talking about someone coming after him who
Would clear his threshing floor!

In some respects, when we reflect on Jesus' baptism, as well as our own baptism

We must realize that it means some deconstruction
Is necessary in our lives
The old self must be torn down
And room made for the new life of Christ
The cleansing and forgiveness the church talks about in baptism
Is no less than dying to the old ways of living rising in Christ so that new ways
can emerge
that's what I see happening across the street
And that is what I see happening at this font
So first we note that Baptism is about cleansing and
forgiveness...a divine reconstruction project.
But that's not all
It is also about identity, and vocation...

John Stendhal, knows how baptism is about identity

He's a pastor in New England

The image he calls to mind to reflect on our identity
Is that of his mother journaling the night of his birth.
She wrote of holding this newborn on her belly
And welcoming him to the world
And being filled with wonder and
Welling up with thanksgiving and praise...

In this event, baptism means more than repentance and cleansing.
Here baptism issues in the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the giving of redemptive identity
The voice in the wilderness, when Jesus was baptized was that of God saying -

You are my beloved. With you I am well pleased.

As for Jesus, so for us. Our first calling, the baptismal call, is the one that simply loves
and names: *You are my child. I delight in you.*

Baptism is about an identity...

Fr. **Henri Nouwen, knows this - a Dutch priest who spent much of his life** ministering to and
with mentally handicapped people at the L'Arche community of Daybreak in Toronto, Canada.

He liked to say that the spiritual life is learning to live the life of the beloved. He continued saying,
that as a member of a community of people with mental disabilities, he learned what it means to
be the beloved. He said that many of the people that I live with hear voices that tell them

that they are no good,

that they are a problem,

that they are a burden,

that they are a failure.

But what I would like to say is that the spiritual life is a life in which you gradually learn to listen to
a voice that says something else, that says, "You are the beloved and on you my favor rests."

Jesus heard that voice.

We want you to hear that voice, too.

People long to hear that voice...

Nouwen tells of Janet - member of community he served.

She was quite handicapped but a wonderful, wonderful lady.

One day, before mass, she said, "Henri, can you bless me?" He made a little cross on her
forehead. She said, "Henri, it doesn't work. No, that is not what I mean." He was embarrassed
and said, "I gave you a blessing." She said, "No, I want to be blessed."

Went on with the mass - he kept thinking, "What does she mean? What could be done?"

After the service I said, "Janet wants a blessing." He had an alb on and a long robe with long
sleeves. With that, Janet walked up to him and put her head against his chest and he
spontaneously put his arms around her, held her, and then looked right into her eyes and said,
"Blessed are you, Janet. You know how much we love you. You know how important you are.
You know what a good woman you are."

She looked at him and said, "Yes, yes, yes, I know."

He suddenly saw all sorts of energy coming back to her.

He distress from before dissipated...

She went back to her place and immediately other people said, "I want that kind of
blessing, too."

The people kept walking up to him and he found myself embracing people for 30 minutes. After the members were returned to their rooms, one of the people in our community who assists the handicapped, a strong guy, a football player, said, "Henri, can I have a blessing, too?" He reached up with his hands on his shoulders and said, "John, you are blessed. You are a good person. God loves you. We love you. You are important." Can you claim that and live as the blessed one? And this big hulk of a man began to tremble, and shake as he broke down and sobbed, they embraced.

Baptism is a cleansing and forgiveness,

A deep and rich identity...

And it also is a vocation...a calling to serve faithfully

And give generously

Well known preacher, Thomas Long once talked to a minister of a church in a dangerous part of the city who was always amazed by a certain woman, a member of his church, who seemed to have no fear about coming to meetings and services at the church at night, even though she had no car and would have to walk home through the dark and frightening streets.

In a world like ours, where deranged individuals strap bombs to their body, there is much to fear...and in this city where this woman lived, where drugs and violence were commonplace, there were no safe paths home...

And yet, one night, after a prayer service at which this woman had been present, the minister was locking up the church, and he happened to see her walking from the church down the street toward her apartment. As she walked, she was holding her hand out, as if some unseen companion were walking with her and holding her hand, and as she walked, she was humming a familiar spiritual, "Precious Lord, take my hand, lead me on help me stand... Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home."

Baptism is a calling to serve faithfully

To not let fear, or adversity or busy-ness or whatever

prevent you from stepping forward to serve

and know that the savior is leading and guiding...

Baptism is also a vocation, or calling to give generously...

Bartenders are accustomed to receiving tips

Waitresses and servers are used to the same

Sometimes the money is on the table,

Sometimes it is handed to them directly

They are familiar with receiving tips as they go about their business

But Pastors, serving communion, not so much

not as accustomed to this practice

but it is with great delight that I relay to you the following...

several weeks ago, as I was distributing communion

I came upon Ross, who is six years old believer

He had his hands folded to I knelt down to give a blessing

As I was getting up to give his mother the bread
He looked up with me and raised his hand - in it he was holding a \$1
I took it, smiled and said thank you. It was an historic moment!!!

My first ever tip at the communion rail!
The offering plates had made it to the back and he still was holding his dollar.
What I take away from that is that:

HE WANTED TO GIVE.
HE CAME TO THE ALTAR READY TO GIVE

This is what happens when you are baptized in the Spirit of Jesus.

You become part of a community whose very essence is to give,
To serve faithfully and give generously,
To reach out and say - what can I do
As a beloved child of God?

Baptism - what an incredible gift - of cleansing and forgiveness
And an identity as the beloved

And a vocation to serve and give
And yet, some of us received the gift of God's Spirit long ago at our baptism, but aren't
doing much to harness the Spirit's power. That's like sitting in a race car with the motor
turned off — like sitting in an I-max theatre with the projector unplugged.

Some years ago, a man traveling from one town to another, stopped at a café to get
something to eat. When the waitress brought his coffee, he spooned three big teaspoons
of sugar into his cup as the waitress stood watching. He then said to the waitress,
"Ma'am, we're going to need more sugar for this table." The waitress looked at him and
replied, "Listen, bud! Before I give you more sugar, you stir what you got!"

Sometimes, with regard to the Holy Spirit, it's like we're sitting in a racecar without
turning on the engine — or sitting in at the I-max without firing up the projector — or
asking for more sugar when we haven't stirred what we've got.

Calvary exits to help you harness the power of the Spirit! To have faith! To Pray! To to
discover community, to answer God's call to serve —whether the call involves going to
the far corners of the earth as a missionary— or teaching Sunday school — or serving on
a committee — or singing in the choir — or staying overnight at our shelter, or serving as
an usher.

It's all God's work,
It's done by our hands
It's the power of the spirit - waiting to be unleashed.
What's stirring in your cup?