

Ordinary, Yet Extraordinary

This past Monday, January 9th, we celebrated the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Often this will be on a Sunday, but when the Epiphany is celebrated on a Sunday after January 6th, the feast gets moved to the Monday after the Epiphany. This Sunday is the second Sunday in Ordinary Time.

The Baptism of the Lord occurs when Jesus is about 30 years of age. And of course it's not like a baptism we have today. Rather, in this action, Jesus is preparing for the start of his public ministry. He stands with other sinners and is baptized by John the Baptist. People would see John in the wilderness to go through the baptism ritual as a way of starting a new chapter in their lives. Jesus, in His baptism, shows us how He stands with us as sinners. Upon His baptism Mark's Gospel tells us a voice comes from the heavens that says "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Jesus is the one we all hope for; now He begins His mission.

This mission is one that changes us. At our own baptism, we are claimed for Jesus. The sign of the cross is made on our forehead by the priest or deacon and we are named, signifying that we are special and unique to God. The water poured over us, the chrism signed on our forehead, and the words "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" bring us closer to God. Through this, and through the mission of our Lord, we become adopted sons and daughters of God. The light of Christ shines with us every day, signified by the Easter Candle that is lit, from which the baptismal candle is then lit too.

What's important to remember is that because we are created by God, and because of the actions of Christ, we are forever unique. We are not just one among many or a number, but we are forever loved by God. Nothing can separate us from that love. And that is important to remember in a world where we can compare ourselves to others, and in a society that values power and getting ahead. God's Kingdom is not like a competition where we have to compete with one another to win better spots in heaven. The Crown of Eternal Life is there for us all. It just requires learning how to respond to our baptism. The Baptism of our Lord began His mission; He then carried that out in the three years that followed.

At the same time, what is important to remember too is that while baptism incorporates us into the Body of Christ, we still deal with our humanity.

Whenever I would hold a baptism class, this was something I always talked about with new parents. I reminded them that while they love their children and will surely do much for them, they are also human. They will make mistakes. They'll let them down; they'll forget something; do something wrong, etc. That's because they are human. And this of course goes for priests too. I go to confession because I am a sinner.

The point is that we are all striving to grow towards sainthood. Baptism does make us extraordinary in a sense in how it brings us closer to God; it claims us for Him, and we receive His love in a special way. But we must also never forget as we move forward,

we'll continually do good things while also making mistakes - hence the other sacraments of Eucharist and reconciliation to help us along the way.

As we get more into the new year, a good thing to do is to never forget what a difference small things make. It's a series of little things and actions we can do to show our love for God and others over the course of our lives that added up do so much.

I think of Ron Carcoski for instance; I had his funeral Mass yesterday, and got to know Ron over the past year as he was an accompanist for our Masses. Ron was great on the piano, and such a kind-hearted guy who loved our parish and getting to know people. He'd also play beautiful preludes before Mass as well. But as I spoke to his family, I learned that while once upon a time he was a music teacher and would have loved a career in music, he opted to work in produce sales to support the family more, and he did so much for them over the years - from practical jokes to being there for them through their ups and downs, and teaching them so much. There was such in his family and as his wife and children shared with me his story, they painted a portrait of a guy who lived his life truly making a difference. What an honor it was to know him, but also to hear of how this man, as a Christian, lived out his faith as a man of faith, hope and love. A wonderful musician, but an even more wonderful human being who made our world a better place.

Indeed, the many little things we do over a lifetime can truly take an ordinary soul and turn them into an extraordinary one called a saint, and do so much for other people too to help them on their journey through this life into the next. May we strive to do that as we live out our baptismal call.

Have a blessed week!

Fr. Paul