

Homily – Baptism of Our Lord – 10th January 2021

Water is heavy. Water is precious. It's a vital ingredient for life. Think of Jacob's Well, the Samaritan Woman carrying a 'Pitcher of Water' on her head, perhaps 3-4 gallons, some considerable distance to home.

The majority of the surface of the world is covered in water, the majority of our bodies, over 90% is water. The Holy Bible teaches us that God made the waters from out of nothing – see the Book of Genesis; bringing all sorts of potential to creation.

Then again at the end of John's Gospel we see the Son of God, by the Sea of Galilee, calling on his disciples to be fishers of 'men' – baptising them by water and the Holy Spirit. The Mosaic Law can decree bathing and washing to assist the curing of disease and sickness. John the Baptist teaches us of bathing in water to mark the desire for the rescuing from a Pagan existence and repentance for the forgiveness from sin. – journeying from desert and outcast in the wilderness to return to the quenching waters of the Promise Land.

It could be remarked that Baptism marks a 'Watershed' in a person's life. A dramatic change in the nature of being a person in a created world. The Baptism of Our Lord which is celebrated today, has two clear messages for us, firstly, the revealing of the Trinity, and secondly, the start of Jesus' public Ministry.

Its significant for us, right at the start of Mark's Gospel that all three persons of the Trinity are mentioned; the Spirit, seen in the shape of a dove, the voice of the Father, who then affirms in words that Jesus is the Son of God. The original Greek word for the tearing open of the heavens is "Schizomenous" which dramatically expresses the truth that the Baptism of Jesus, marks the powerful intervention of a Trinitarian God in changing the face of the world forever,

We may see the COVID-19 pandemic as changing the face of the earth forever; well, in a God centred way the Baptism of Jesus, for the good of the world has an even more dramatic effect on our lives. As God the Father affirms the Baptism of His beloved Son at the start of the Gospel; so, Jesus at the end of the Gospel affirms his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations baptising them in the name of the Father, and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

In the same parallel, it is beautiful and right to baptise a new born baby into the Trinitarian God at the start of their lives, so that, at the end of their lives, they have the reassurance of knowing they belong to the Baptised People of God.

Recently, I was in the hospital to give the last sacrament to a young man who had been violently attacked – his beloved sister called the priest, knowing her brother had been baptised and confirmed, had made his Holy Communion, - Praying that he could be reconciled to God.

Being a Christian in a dispirited and scary world is not always easy and the great founding saints of the Church encourage us to embrace the 3 persons in One God, St Peter reminds us in his 1st Letter, "you who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ, and sprinkled with his blood".

St Paul often starts his letters with the reminder of the Trinity by greeting us with, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all".

Our baptism is fundamental to our living out the Catholic Christian life. It is the true source of our salvation – All our Christian ethics, values and aspirations flow from it.

It is, as Fr Francis Marsden describes, an irruption, in other words, a dramatic influx of supernatural power to recreate and refashion a creation which has been so damaged by disease, ignorance and the powers of darkness.

I'll finish with the wonderful words of St Gregory Nazianzen, who, writing in the 4th century, himself baptised, wrote of the effect of Jesus' Baptism.

“Today let us do honour to Christ's baptism and celebrate this feast in holiness. Be cleansed entirely and continue to be cleansed.

Nothing gives such pleasure to God as the conversion and salvation of men, women & Children, for whom His every word and every revelation exist”.

God Bless you all,

Fr Jeremy Bath