A friend with whom I grew up in Southern California really did not learn very much about our Catholic faith until he had to go to marriage preparation. He went as begrudgingly to it as he had gone to years of faith formation and then sporadically to the youth group. He was greatly surprised and even excited by what he learned while getting prepared for marriage and he said to me, “Why didn’t they ever tell us this stuff before?” and I replied that we were in the same classes and they had told me. He laughed and acknowledged it may have been similar to the things he was not very receptive to being taught while we were together in public school. He’s retired now and he and his wife are still married. They raised their children in the Catholic faith and now are trying to help pass on the faith to their grandchildren. We never know who or what might cause our faith to catch fire or rekindle it. We never know when some circumstance might touch us and give us an insight into our God.

We may wonder why, since John the Baptist grew up with Jesus, twice in today’s gospel John the Baptist states that he did not know or recognize him. Perhaps the trouble was not in recognizing Jesus, but in recognizing Jesus as the Christ, as the Lamb of God. John knew Jesus as a carpenter, as Mary’s son, as a devout Jewish man, but it was a big leap to seeing him as the Son of God, the light to the nations. John knew Jesus, but he didn’t know everything about Jesus, couldn’t tell Jesus was the messiah until it was revealed to him by God at the baptism of Jesus.

Probably few people would have looked at Jesus and observed anything more than a humble carpenter. It is quite a leap from seeing Jesus as a carpenter, as Mary’s son, or even as holy Jewish man to perceiving him to be the light to the nations and the Son of God. That is a leap which requires both grace and an openness to God which a lot of people even today cannot make. So we really cannot fault John because don’t we, too, at least sometimes, fail to really see a person or situation, especially when we think or assume we are already knowledgeable? We may sometimes think we know something or someone only to be surprised. We, too, may at times think we know all about Jesus, know God, only to be repeatedly surprised and wonder why we had never previously learned or suspected something.

We can never exhaust the mystery of another human being and certainly not the mystery of God: there is always more to learn, more in which to take delight and by which to be surprised. We are all created in the image and likeness of God and are by nature mysterious beings. We are all called to be holy and sanctified in Christ Jesus, no matter what our calling or vocation or occupation may be. Holiness is what just happens to us when we become close friends with Jesus. From before our conception in our mother’s womb, we have been chosen to be servants of God, called to an honorable life close to God so as to let the light of Christ shine in us so that through us other people might be attracted to the light and find salvation in Christ Jesus. Our holiness is individualized. God has no mold or cookie cutter to which we must conform. Each of us has individually been called by name because each of us has a distinctly lived personal experience and we each uniquely become a friend of Jesus.

John the Baptist was a humble and holy Jewish man. He was open to God’s voice, open to having his expectations adjusted, open to Gods will as it was manifest in his life. John did not bask in the notoriety he was receiving, was not jealous as people began to turn to Jesus and away from him. He knew that Jesus must increase while he decreased. He had come to recognize that Jesus was the Lamb of God, who had come to take away the sins of the world, and that was more important than John’s fame or popularity.
The scriptures today call each of us as disciples of Christ to a daily commitment to deepen our relationship with Jesus and our understanding of our faith and thus to truly be able to live our faith. Through the call, consecration and commission of Christian baptism, we are urged to come to understand and identify ourselves as people gifted by God and with a responsibility to generously share what we have been given with others -- and that is not just material goods but also the Good News of the Gospel, our faith.

Our status as people chosen and beloved by God demands daily attentiveness and daily change, conversion and growth. We also recognize that living out our baptismal commitment is a cooperative, not a lone ranger, endeavor worked out in community as members of the Body of Christ. We are on this pilgrimage together and accompanied by saints and sinners and people we may like or dislike. Chosen by God, we are consecrated and graced and equipped by God for anything we are asked to attempt. We are called, consecrated and commissioned to be a light in this world, to let the light of Jesus shine in and through us so that by our lives we illuminate (and not cloud or dim or confuse) the gospel truth. We are called, consecrated and commissioned to be a place where others can meet and know and love and serve God. With God’s grace may we seek and come to an ever greater knowledge and deeper love of Jesus the Christ.

May we develop a close, personal relationship with Him and come to more easily to recognize Him in the faces of our sisters and brothers that through us the light of Christ may shine and enlighten even the very ends of the earth. May God be blessed.

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