

One day, humanity will treat each other as beloved sons and daughters

Year B – 2021 The Baptism of the Lord

Is 55:1-11, Ps 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10, 1 Jn 5:1-9, Mk 1:7-11



We celebrate today the Baptism of the Lord. Baptism celebrates a new orientation in thinking and perception. Scripture, with the brush and oils of many artists, influences our mental image of the Lord's baptism. Sometimes it helps to take a second look. I picture the River Jordan. I can hear the sound of moving water. I can see John standing some ways off from the shore. He immerses someone as Jesus watches. As he breaks the surface, Jesus approaches John and asks to be baptized.

If baptism is the celebration of a new orientation in thought and perception, where was Jesus going with this? His baptism marks the beginning of his public ministry. At 30 years of age, through prayer and training, Jesus is able to embrace all of humanity. His baptism marks the start of his journey to gather all mankind into one. That is a change in thinking and orientation not for himself but humanity.

If we read scripture, Old Testament and New, there are always stories of war pitting one tribe against another. There is a reason for this. What I am about to suggest I do so with the greatest respect for humanity. There was a time in our evolution that *herd mentality* was important to our survival as a group. Any group that differed from 'our herd' was perceived to be a dangerous threat and, in terms of early survival, perhaps rightly so. In his ministry, Jesus shares with us the parable of the Good Samaritan. The beaten man, a Jew, lying at the side of the road, is ignored by the priest and Levite. He is then cared for by a Samaritan for whom there is great racial animosity. Jesus asks us, "Which of these three were a neighbor to the man? Jesus is asking us to reorient ourselves from a herd mentality to a vision of respect and dignity for our fellow man. The ministry of Jesus asks us to recognize that we are all, without exception, created in God's image and likeness. Therein, is our inherent dignity, value and worth.

Herd mentality is exclusive rather than inclusive. Herd mentality is so deeply engrained that it creates a propensity towards injustice. Consider the bird watcher in New York who asks a woman to leash her dog as required by law. One individual is white the other black. For no other reason, the report of an attack is made to the police.

Jesus's message in the parable of, "The Good Samaritan" is that, *all men and women are created equal*, and are worthy of our respect. When we disregard and exclude those who differ, we discredit the good work that God has brought about in that life. Jesus comes up out of the River Jordan shaking the water from his hair. He feels a profound intimacy with God. He will revisit this moment in prayer many times.

Henri Nouwen offers a reflection that I think fitting:

At issue here is the question: "To whom do I belong? God or to the world?" Many of my daily preoccupations suggest that I belong more to the world than to God. A little criticism makes me angry, and a little rejection makes me depressed. A little praise raises my spirits, and a little success excites me. It takes very little to raise me up or thrust me down. Often I am like a small boat on the ocean, completely at the mercy of its waves. All the time and energy I spend in keeping some kind of balance and preventing myself from being tipped over and drowning shows that my life is mostly a struggle for survival: not a holy struggle, but an anxious struggle resulting from the mistaken idea that it is the world that defines me. . . .

As long as we belong to this world, we will remain subject to its competitive ways and expect to be rewarded for all the good we do. But when we belong to God, who loves us without conditions, we can live as he does. The great conversion called for by Jesus is to move from belonging to the world to belonging to God.

References

All scripture quotations are taken from. (1987). *The New American Bible, Revised edition*. USCCB.

Nouwen, H. (2017). *You are the beloved*. New York, New York, USA: Convergent Books.

Note: Due to Covid-19 this homily was not delivered in person but posted on the St. Thomas More Catholic Student Parish website.