



Thoughts on the Journey...

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In the late 1980's, there was a story floating around involving Robert Redford and a woman in an ice-cream parlor. I remember it because, at the time, I was a huge Robert Redford fan. The story was cute and I had repeated it a number of times when Redford's name came up. As it turned out, a number of years after I heard it, I discovered it was just an urban legend. The story had also been connected to the likes of Paul Newman, Jack Nicholson, and a few other leading men. Even urban legend's have their place, so, for the sake of this article, I'm going to tell it again.

A woman was in an ice-cream parlor in Santa Fe, New Mexico when Robert Redford and his family came in right behind her in line for ice cream. She was so excited to be standing so close to her favorite actor, but was determined not to act ridiculously giddy or to invade his privacy. In the woman's effort to be composed, she tried fiercely to be herself, but ended up being distracted and pre-occupied with her own effort. When it was her turn to be waited on, the store clerk filled her order, returned her change, and then the woman left the store.

In all the excitement, she realized that she left the store without her ice cream cone. She re-entered to tell the man who waited on her that she left the store without her ice-cream cone. The gentleman responded that he most certainly gave it to her. Certain that he didn't, she again claimed that she did not receive her cone. Being a witness to the transaction, Robert Redford stepped in and said, "Excuse me madam, but he did give you your cone; I saw him. I'm sure if you look in your purse, you'll find it there where you put it."

In spite of her effort to keep her wits about her in the presence of "greatness", she was lost in the moment. She ended up doing something she would never have done had it not been for Robert Redford standing behind her in the ice-cream parlor.

In the gospel of Matthew this week, Jesus comes to the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist. John, recognizing that he was in the presence of the Messiah, became overwhelmed by Jesus' request for John to baptize him. Here he was, standing before the very Messiah he had been

waiting for, and yet it is Jesus who asks John, a lowly prophet, to baptize him.

John tried to prevent him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?" Jesus said to him in reply, "Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."

You can just imagine the scene in Galilee as John the Baptist gathered many people to the Jordan River to repent, be baptized, and prepare themselves for the coming of the Savior. For John, it had to be exciting to be in the presence of the Lord. But, for the crowd, Jesus just looked like everyone else. Certainly not the "greatness" that most people had conjured in their minds about who the Messiah may be. And then, as Jesus is being baptized and was coming out of the water, the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descended upon him, and the voice of God announced His pleasure with His Son. What started out to be an ordinary day at the Jordan River, just turned into an event involving "greatness" of profound proportion - and that's no urban legend.

For all of us who believe and are baptized, the baptism of the Lord is an event that changed everything! We are no longer mindlessly fumbling through life; we have purpose and direction. Through our own baptism, we have been given distinction as children of the Kingdom. We have been given a share in the divinity of God and we've also been given a part in the mission of salvation. The *share in God's divinity* is freely given to us in baptism, but the *participation in the mission* requires daily conscious action. This is no time to forget who we are and put our ice-cream cones in our purse! We have been given the grace to do great things before the presence of God. We are called to put our selfishness aside, to love deeper, to be servants to all those around us, and to stand firmly in awe of our Father who invites us into his everlasting community of love.

In this new year, perhaps the most important resolution we can make is to remember the greatness of our God and the divinity He shares with us, to keep our spiritual wits about us trusting that he stands with us, and stand tall and firm in our resolve to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ.