

Living Water Inclusive Catholic Community
Liturgy & Eucharist via web-based video conferencing (Zoom)
Baptism of Jesus, Year B: January 10, 2021
Homily by Rev. Jacqueline M. Clarys, RCWP-USA

First Reading: Isaiah 42: 1–4, 6–7. **Psalm (29) R:** “Our God will bless the people with Peace.”
Second Reading: Acts 10:34–38. **Gospel Reading:** Mark 1:7–11.

Today’s Feast, which our Inclusive Lectionary¹ names as Baptism of Jesus, calls to mind the story of our own Baptisms. As is true for many of us, I’m told that mine happened when I was an infant, ten days old. I am thinking of the faithfulness of my Mother, who at ten days post-partum thought that the most important place she could be with her new-born was at the Baptismal font. Back then (1954), our church’s font was tucked away in a little alcove at the back of the church, and that is where Baptisms took place after the crowd of people attending Liturgy had left: the Parents, Godparents, Priest, and maybe a few family members gathered almost privately for a brief ritual. By contrast, Baptism now takes place within the context of the Community’s Liturgy, for all to witness. This difference in the outward appearance of the Baptismal Sacramental Celebration reflects the change in theological emphasis that came with Vatican II, an emphasis which echoes earliest Christianity’s understanding of Baptism, that of membership in the Church. Baptism, among other things, gathers us into “the common priesthood of all the faithful.”² The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that, in Christ,

“The whole community of believers is, as such, priestly. The faithful exercise their baptismal priesthood through their participation, each according to [their] own vocation, in Christ’s mission as priest, prophet, and king [leader, teacher]. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation the faithful are “consecrated to be...a holy priesthood.”³

¹ *Inclusive Lectionary Sunday Readings with Responsorial Psalms Cycle B* (Hyattsville, MD: Quixote Center, 2008), 28.

² *Catholic Church*. “The Sacrament of Holy Orders,” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), §1546, p. 386.

³ *Ibid.*

It goes on to say that "...the common priesthood of the faithful is exercised by the unfolding of baptismal grace—a life of faith, hope, and charity, a life according to the Spirit..." and that "...the ministerial priesthood is at the service of the common priesthood."⁴ This last distinction is a reference to the ordained: the ordained person's role is one of *service* to the Community.

Our reading from Isaiah opens with the first of four poems known as The Servant Songs, also named Songs of the Suffering Servant. Those who encountered Jesus in his ministry would have recognized in him reflections of these ancient passages, images and ideas that helped the Community gathered around Jesus to create meaning and understanding around their experiences of his life, teachings, example, and ultimately, of his death. As is true of great literature, the meaning to be found in The Servant Songs is neither static nor one-dimensional. Rather, interpretations of these prophetic writings are multi-layered and ongoing, allowing both whole communities and individuals to locate themselves within them, and within the idea of service. In that spirit, it would be good to remind ourselves of how the words service, servant leader, or serve may fall on the ears of those who live with the legacy of oppression imposed by, for instance, our history of slavery, Jim Crow experiences, patriarchal systems, and other injustices. Accordingly, we are invited to understand *servant-leadership* in an expanded and freeing context that leads to involvement; face-the-world engagement; justice-seeking; and the proliferation of wholeness. "Service" as such is anything that relieves oppression, exclusion, unfairness, literal and figurative not-enough-ness, and advances a norm of all voices at the table, seeking the truth.

We say that Jesus' ministry began with his Baptism: as such, it marked the beginning of his service to the people, which was prominently characterized by Compassion and Love. This is our model. And so too, the waters of Baptism signify ministry for each of us. It is fair to say that

⁴ *Catholic Church*. "The Sacrament of Holy Orders," *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), § 1547, p. 386.

the symbol of water for our Living Water Community “runs deep!” Of the many aspects of that symbol, the one that Baptism most calls up is that of ongoing, and pervasive, transformation. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus (535–475 BCE) famously said, “We cannot step twice into the same river.” Likewise, we enter Baptism’s River of Grace at a different place, each time. As full participants in Christ, the faithful meet with the flowing Waters of Baptism for all of our lives, continually taking some New Grace from them wherever we find ourselves. That is the theological gift we enjoy because of Baptism, bringing with it the advantages of continual Renewal and Conversion; and of the humility that accompanies the opportunity of being born again of the Spirit, whatever our history, or circumstances. The faithful’s conscious taking up and acceptance, over a lifetime, of the Grace offered to us as infants allows us (our egos, our mistakes, our failings) to die with Christ, so that, we may rise with Christ.

While we can’t know the entirety of the impulse that led Jesus to the Jordan that day, we can be assured that it was both his Humanity and his Divinity that approached the Waters of Baptism. It seems that he knew and trusted his cousin John’s instinct for the Divine. Jesus sensed and engaged the truth of the Baptism that John preached, and sought its surrendering necessity, its full immersion in Spirit, for himself. The voice from heaven in that moment of humility and surrender is meant for us, too: “You are my Beloved, my Own. On you my favor rests.”