

Homily
1-16-11
(Deacon Ron)

My baptism

Some children were watching a river baptism from a distance. They were close enough to see the Baptist minister immerse people and say certain words, but they couldn't hear exactly what he was saying. However, they decided to imitate him. That afternoon they conducted their own baptism ceremony in the back yard. They had a rain barrel full of water. The little girls in the neighborhood all brought their dolls. A little boy was in a frock coat acting as minister. Someone who was observing the proceedings saw him pick up one of the dolls, hold it over the rain barrel and say, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and into the hole you go." Then he dunked it down.

The themes of the gospel for last week and today are about Jesus' baptism and his identity- "There is the Lamb of God"

Last week Jesus enters the swirling waters of the Jordan river. A river Jesus knows is critically important to the Jewish people. For it was through the Jordan river that Joshua led the Israel to inherit the land that God had given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The river Jordan is also where Elijah bless Elisha and tells him to go and that Elisha will do twice what Elijah has done. And subsequently coming up out the Jordan Elijah is taken up in a chariot of fire. So Jesus was very much aware of the sacred nature not only of this river but of this particular location in that river.

What must of gone through his human mind as he stood there? Was he aware that as he enters that river and moves toward John the Baptist, that he is walking away from all that he has known as a child, as a young man. He is walking away from that and into a mystery which perhaps he can only vaguely foresee. Did he know how his life would be changed by the decision he is making to enter that water, to allow John to baptize him (to consecrate him in a way to God forever)?

I was thinking perhaps as Jesus enters the river and moves towards John, he was scared of what this might mean for him, for his family. "Here," he might have thought " I am a simple man, where are these thoughts; this call to holiness coming from." Is he by entering that river giving permission to God to control his life, to plan his destiny? From his human perspective he might have wondered, as we might wonder sometimes, "am i ready to place everything in my life in God's hands?"

John the Baptist, as we hear today gospel, says that he saw a dove and he recognizes Jesus as the son of God. But what Jesus saw or heard we don't know. Were God's words for John only? Were they said as a testimony to John that his mission was now fulfilled, his time was nearly over?

In Matthew's gospel we hear that Jesus is led directly from the river into the desert. The desert, like our Lent is for us, is that ancient place for discernment of God's will. Jesus now must discern what his mission will be. What the direction he has chosen in his life will entail. What it means to be a "Son of God." Jesus knew the scriptures and prophets very well. He knew well today's first reading. Perhaps in the quiet stillness of that desert he heard the words echoing from Isaiah, that we heard today in our first reading-"It is too little for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the survivors of Israel. I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation will reach to the ends of the earth."

Following his temptations, Jesus probably returned from the desert and crossed the Jordan again only now as he approaches John, John understands not only who Jesus truly is, but also what his mission will be. He exclaims a truth never heard in Israel before- that God has a son, and that son has become a man who walks among us and he is and will be the lamb of God who will take away our sins.

Jesus' story we all know very well. What we don't know so well is our own story.

Most of us were baptized as infants. We were so small we had no awareness of what the priest or deacon was saying or doing to us. Most of us have heard about what happened in that rite or what was said by watching other babies or adults being baptized. But how often have we been able to get our heads are the fact that we were baptized, consecrated and made sons and daughters of God. **That that is our identity.** How often do we, when we look into the mirror, capture that glimpse of ourselves.

Our readings for both of these weeks invite us to consider what it means for us to be a son or a daughter of God. The readings invite us to look into our lives and see how we are choosing to live out that reality, or whether we are rejecting subconsciously that role and all that that means. How often have we sat quietly to discern what

God wants from us? What God wants for us? Or do the temptations of the world try to lead us away from realizing who we are truly in God. What we truly could be?

In the second reading today, which is the opening lines from St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Paul states his belief of who these Corinthians are (**and yes, who we are also**) as he says- "to the Church of God that is in corinth (**that is in Tolland**) to you who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be holy, with all those who call upon the lord Jesus Christ, their lord and ours." He speaks to them of that special image he sees within them and which he prays they will see within themselves. An image of themselves, not just as people who go to church, people who call themselves Catholics or Christians, but people who can feel in their very hearts and souls the meaning of what it means to be a son or daughter of God, as one author, Harold Hill wrote "**How to Live as a King's Kid.**" A people who are willing to go out and live their lives with that sacred image fused into all that they do, all that they say.

In his letter to the Romans Paul writes on this same subject and says- "*do not be conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect*" (Romans 12:2).

You are working in a garden on a beautiful sunlit morning pulling out dandelions.

Suddenly, you drop to your knees and discover beauty in the unique coloring, beauty

In the intricate design, beauty even in the strange smell. Suddenly the dandelion is

Transformed. You know it's more than just an ugly yellow weed; it's a little bit of the

Wonder and the glory of God. Suddenly, you can appreciate in a whole new way what it is and

perhaps because of that you then can perceive who you are in God's eyes better.

You come to church regularly for years. Over-and-over again, you listen to the same old

stories, sing the same old hymns, say the same old prayers, and your spirit becomes

sleepy and dull and lifeless. But one day it happens! Suddenly, one sunday, you experience

a breakthrough. By some miracle you are visited by an angel of the lord who whispers

*to your soul a message of hope, a message of faith: God is the God of history, **your history**;*

Suddenly your lifeless old spirit is transformed into a powerhouse of

outlandish faith and hope. Suddenly your sleepy old spirit is interrupted by the wildest imaginable dreams of what the Lord has prepared for those who live in harmony with His will. And suddenly, you can hear yourself singing from every fiber of your being, the words we sang today in the responsorial psalm; "Here am I, lord, I come to do you will."