

Baptism of the Lord Cycle A and C

There was this drunk guy and one day after an all night drunk, he was heading out towards the lake and heard a big commotion. He went over and saw this guy dunking people in the water. He walked over to see what was going on that this guy grabbed him and dunked him in the water. When he came up the guy asked him, "Son, have you found Jesus?" The drunk guy said no. Then he got dunked again, same question, "Son, have you found Jesus?" No was the answer. A third time, and same question, "Son, have you found Jesus?" The drunk guy then said, no, you sure this is where he fell in?

You might ask what this story has to do with the baptism of Jesus and I think it illustrates the confusion over just what baptism is all about. The baptism of John the Baptist was a baptism of repentance. It was not meant to be a sign of one membership or affiliation with being a Jew. The baptism the preacher tried to give the drunk guy likewise was not a sign of one's participation or membership in a particular religion. It was an acceptance of Jesus as one's savior. We in the Catholic Religion look at baptism a little different and in addition to the sacramental graces that flow from baptism, we hold onto what happened after the baptism. After the baptism, the heavens opened and the Father confirmed the identity of Jesus as His son. Likewise, when we are baptized into the Catholic Faith, our identity is confirmed as a member of the Body of Christ. The real issue then becomes, what do we do with our identity?

I have a friend who is a corporate executive and his company does business with the casino's. Because he is an officer of his company he had to submit to a background check with the State Police. When he did, the police came to see him and told him that they had been looking for him that he was under investigation for all sorts of crimes from passing bad checks to fraud and all sorts of things. It turns out that his identity had been stolen. We are all faced with a similar challenge with respect to our Catholic Christian identity. Are we being faithful to our identity or not? Has Society stolen our Catholic Christian identity?

Here's what I mean. After Jesus' baptism, he set out on his public ministry. He ultimately changed the world by offering all of us salvation. He taught us by his example the way we should live our lives. And right before he left after his resurrection, He left us with a challenge, "go make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit". By our baptism, we become part of the challenge, to make disciples of all people. We do it by the way we live our lives. Each one of us can use this day as a day to reflect on the way we are living our lives and asking ourselves if we are being true to our baptism, to our identity. There are those out there that are trying to steal our identity. They are the ones putting temptation before us. You know who they are. They are the purveyors of smut on TV and in the movies, they are the ones producing pornography that is for sale at convenience stores, they are the ones trying to take God out of our society, they are the ones promoting abortion, they are the ones promoting "safe sex" even before marriage. I can go on and on and on. These are the obvious ones. But there are others that are less obvious.

Some of the less obvious ones include so called friends that discourage us from attending mass or who tempt us to miss mass with inviting invitations. Some people have spouses that discourage them from developing their prayer life. Some employers will not allow their employees to have any sign of their faith on their desk or in their office. I could go on and on, but these are subtle things that distract us from our calling to spread the Gospel. These outside influences make it all the more important for us to associate with people that share our common beliefs and faith. It is why we create community within our Church. Just this past Friday, at work, we were all called into a meeting and our boss's boss came in and informed us about the strategy to meet the Governor's mandate that we cut our budget. Six people lost their jobs, but none were in our section. After the meeting, we had a smaller meeting with just our section and when it was over, we were all standing there both relieved that we had kept our jobs, but sad and concerned for the six that got laid off. I asked if it was appropriate to say a prayer. It was sort of weird, everyone looked at each other and then looked around and it was obvious that we wanted to say a prayer, but we didn't know if we could. We asked if anybody had an objection and made it clear that if someone was uncomfortable that we would not pray. Then I led us all in a prayer of thanksgiving and a prayer for the six. In our work environment this was a risk. But, sometimes you just have to take a risk to do what is right.

And then there are the political leaders who in their own way are trying to steal our identity. They have stripped God from many areas of our lives and they have done it in insidious ways. Just this week I read an article about the Speaker of the House of Representatives that is pro-abortion and claims to be Catholic. In the article, she said that her support of abortion is consistent with her Catholic Faith. This is absolutely false. You have heard the statement that sometimes you just don't know what you don't know. Well this is such a case. She doesn't even know her own faith and yet she is out there making statements that appear to have authority. First, she has no authority in this arena and her authority in the public arena does not extend to this arena. Secondly, not only does she not have authority in this arena, she is subject to the authority of church leaders in this arena. She rejects the authority of the Church, and in doing so, she has the potential of pulling others away from the truth and in effect stealing their Catholic Christian identity.

Today's Gospel shows us that even the God of the universe humbled himself to submit to baptism which was totally unnecessary because he was sinless. If he can humble himself, then we surely should imitate Him and humble ourselves by submitting to a life that is consistent with His teaching. In doing so, we can protect ourselves from the kind of identity theft that can lead to the loss of our soul and the loss of our eternal reward. We don't need to buy identity theft protection to protect our soul. It is bought and paid for by the incarnation, suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord and savior, Jesus Christ. We simply need to accept his gift. We cannot earn it, we simply accept it. And, the way we accept it is by living out our own baptism and confirmation by being true to ourselves no matter what society says. In that way, we stand up, stand out and we become a beacon of light in what has become an increasingly dark world.