

Baptism of the Lord B “Living our Baptism as Priests Prophets and Kings”

Fr. Frank Schuster

And so here we are at last, the culmination of the Christmas Season. During Advent, we held vigil with the ancient Hebrews awaiting the birth of a savior. We also celebrated our hope of the return of Christ at the end of time. On Christmas morning, we celebrated the birthday of the incarnate God in the person of Jesus Christ. The last two weekends we unpacked what that means as we celebrated the feast days of the Holy Family and Epiphany. We asked ourselves, what does it mean to welcome Jesus into our family? We asked ourselves, what gifts do I bring to Jesus? Everything that we have celebrated in the Church since the first Sunday of Advent comes to its summit and completion in today's feast day, the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord.

And this is no mistake. A professor of mine at Mundelein, Fr. Larry Hennessey, always impressed upon us that the most important day of our lives was the day of our baptism. On the day of our baptism, we are configured to Christ and are reborn into his family. On the feast day of the Baptism of the Lord, Jesus has given us the greatest gift of all, the hope of eternal salvation. As we conclude the holy season of Christmas this weekend, we are correct to remember this gift of salvation that has been offered to all the baptized. This celebration also invites us to evaluate for ourselves how we reflect the grace of baptism in our lives, in our conduct and how we are living out our vocation in the Body of Christ.

Bishop Robert Barron in his Word on Fire reflection once suggested that the best way to unpack this question is by way of the chrismation prayer during the rite of infant baptism. After the child is baptized, the priest anoints the head of the child with Sacred Chrism, and offers this instruction. The priest says, “The God of power and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin and brought you to new life through water and the Holy Spirit. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation so that, united with his people, you may remain forever a member of Christ who is Priest, Prophet and King.” This is a very remarkable statement. What the Church is saying is, by our baptism into Christ, we become priests, prophets and kings. How about that?

We may think, “Now wait a minute, I am not a priest. Fr. Frank is a priest.” And yes, there is the ordained priesthood that comes from the sacrament of Holy Orders which configures me to Christ for public ministry in the name of the Church. However, by our baptism, every one of us has been anointed a priest of Jesus Christ as a member of his Body. And so, what does it mean to be a priest in this sense? Well, a priest is first and foremost a person of prayer. A priest biblically is someone who walks the borders with one foot in this world and one foot in the divine world. A priest is someone who intercedes for others, lifting their needs to the throne of God. By our baptism, we have been united to Christ

and are therefore capable of lifting others to Christ by our prayers. And so, on the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord, we can ask ourselves: Do I pray? Do I pray for the people in my life? Does my family pray together, in the morning, at meal times, at bed time? The highest form of prayer in the life of Church is attending Sunday Mass where we honor the Sabbath together as a community of priests, actively and consciously celebrating together Christ's sacrifice for us as we are fed by his Body and Blood. We can ask ourselves: Is Sunday Mass a priority for me and my family or do other things become more important? Parents, do you pray for your children? Children, do you pray for your parents, siblings, and classmates? You see, by our baptism, we are all priests of Jesus Christ. We are all called to be mediators between earth and heaven. This happens every time we pray.

By our baptism, we also participate in the prophetic office of Jesus Christ. Yes, by our baptism we are called to be prophets? What characterizes prophets in the bible? Prophets are the ones who proclaim the truth that comes from God. Prophets also can get into a lot of trouble for doing so, because the truth isn't always popular. To live our baptismal calling to be prophets, however, we must know our faith. We must be able to provide a reason for our hope. This is accomplished through spiritual reading, perhaps attending one of the faith formation programs we offer here at the parish, making a list of the questions we have and seeking answers. Exercising the prophetic office of Jesus Christ also requires great patience, humility and charity on our part, proclaiming the Gospel by the example of our lives. And so on this feast day, we can ask ourselves, when I invite someone over to my house, would they know that I am Catholic by looking around? Do the people in my life even know that I am Catholic or do I do everything in my power to hide this? When asked about my Catholic faith, can I give a reason for my hope in a spirit of humility and love? If I can, then I am living my baptismal call as a prophet of Jesus Christ.

By our baptism, we are also called to participate in the Kingship of Christ. What does it mean to be a King? Well, a king is someone who takes charge, exercises leadership, and takes responsibility for the world around them. The best icon of what this looks like is right here on our altar. On our altar is an icon of the last supper inspired by the Gospel of St. John. And how does Jesus exercise his Kingship in this icon? He does so by kneeling in the dust and washing his disciples' feet. Is he in charge? No question there. Is he exercising leadership? Yes, Jesus does so by example. Is he taking responsibility for the world around him? Yes, by his sacrifice. And so, as we celebrate the baptism of the Lord, we can ask ourselves: do I exercise leadership as modeled by Christ? Do I lead by example? Do I take responsibility for the souls I am entrusted with? Am I willing to make sacrifices for the wellbeing of my family and community? When we do so, we participate in the Kingship of Christ.

Wow, this sure turned into a heavy homily, didn't it? I do believe it is important for us to consider these things today. Why? As we conclude our celebration of the Christmas season, the Church reminds us on this feast day, that the most important day of our lives was the day of our baptism. On the day of our baptism, we were configured to Christ and were reborn into his family. You see, on the feast day of the Baptism of the Lord, Jesus has given us the greatest gift of all, the hope of eternal salvation. And so, we are invited today to renew our baptismal promises, and celebrate our vocation in the Body of Christ, as priests, prophets and kings.