

HOMILY – BAPTISM OF THE LORD – 2021
by Father Don McLaughlin

Today we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus and liturgically speaking, we end the Christmas Season. Most of you, probably long ago have put away your Christmas decorations. Today's feast moves us from the infant Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem to the adult Jesus at the River Jordan.

As part of my homily today I want to share with you the statement from our Bishop regarding the events that took place in our nation's capital this past Wednesday.

"I join people of good will in condemning the violence today at the United States Capitol. This is not who we are as Americans. I am praying for members of Congress and Capitol staff and for the police and all those working to restore order and public safety.

"The peaceful transition of power is one of the hallmarks of this great nation. In this troubling moment, we must recommit ourselves to the values and principles of our democracy and come together as one nation under God. I entrust all of us to the heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary. May she guide us in the ways of peace, and obtain for us wisdom and the grace of a true patriotism and love of country."

I join our bishop in condemning violence. I believe that there is no cause or injustice that can be righted by protests where violence and destruction of property occur, and the safety of all is disregarded. Having said that, a religion may have appeal when it imposes few demands on its followers, but such is not the religion of the prophet Isaiah in our first reading, and is certainly not the religion of Jesus Christ!

In the first reading today, Isaiah speaks in the name of God, to the chosen people. His words appear spoken to one, but they are offered to all as a challenge to do God's work. God didn't "choose" this people to preserve them as a museum piece, but to be a light to all nations.

When Peter addresses the crowd in our second reading today from Acts, he presents Jesus as a model for new converts to Christianity by showing that Jesus was a doer – he "went about doing good" – and no less is expected of his followers!

Mark's gospel today recounts the baptism of Jesus. This was not only a purification ritual – it was also a rite of commission. Upon his baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan, Jesus embarked on his public ministry.



As we see in this reading, we are baptized not only in water, but “baptized in the Spirit.” This means we are **EMPOWERED** to do as Jesus did: go about doing good.

Most of us understand that the church has a mission, but not ourselves, personally. We see baptism as a “christening” and freedom from Original Sin, but not as commissioning us to perform a ministry.

Most of us were baptized as infants with no cognitive ability to understand this truth at the time of our baptism.

And while many of us went to Catholic schools or Religious Education Programs, somehow we missed this mandate of becoming a disciple after the heart of Jesus and of having a personal relationship with him. We learned things ABOUT God, Jesus, and the Church, but for the most part, didn’t realize the demands of being Catholic.

We experience union with Jesus in holy communion, but are not inclined to experience union with him in being delegated by him to carry on his work. Religion, for many, remains “private” – we perceive ourselves as members of a church, rather than servants – doers – of a cause.

In truth, we are baptized for a cause. And what is that cause? To be people who do good! Baptism commissions us to do the work of Jesus according to our capabilities. In our own right, it is our duty to teach, counsel, admonish, heal, forgive, comfort, feed the hungry, be a light to those in darkness, whenever other people need such services and we are in a position to offer them.

Not a day goes by that of people who need a helping hand, a kind word, a touch of sympathy, a piece of advice, a warning, a sign of peace, light on a problem, a prayer, an answer to a pressing question. These are opportunities of grace for each of us to perform acts of ministry.

The demands placed upon us by our Baptism are not always easy. To teach that abortion, racism, neglect of the poor and injustice are sins is not always welcome, but must be said. To admonish against violence often falls on deaf ears. To warn that a house divided cannot stand is often laughed at. To seek mutual understanding through listening and dialogue, mercy and forgiveness is often ridiculed. But these are the causes Jesus gave his life for – to establish the kingdom of God on earth – not a political kingdom, but God’s kingdom. Christians should be about doing the same as well!

