

January 11, 2009

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord - Cycle B

Fr. Larry Richards

Good morning. Two days ago I was in Naples, Florida. I didn't want to come back. Sorry. It was so beautiful. I got stuck in Cleveland for a while on Friday when I was trying to get home. But anyways I am back. Isn't it exciting? And today we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. As we come to celebrate the Feast of the Baptism one thing we are always going to have to know, what happened to Jesus happens to us. This is the epiphany that when God says, "You are My beloved Son." And so what we have today is we celebrate these people coming in to the Church whether they are going to be baptized or receiving the full communion we also celebrate our own identity. Because we reveal today that God says to Jesus, "You are my Son," but in Jesus, what does that make us? Son and daughters of the Father. Right Adam?

I taught Adam you know when he was, what grade were you in Adam? Freshman, when I taught you? I taught you two years in a row? So I taught you sacraments, right? And you remember everything I taught you, right? Everything. Can you imagine I taught him his freshman and sophomore year and I married him? His poor wife. I baptized his kids. So if I ask you any questions on the sacraments of Baptism since I taught you Baptism Adam, you would remember right? See how I abuse those children. See how I did it? Adam, I did pick on a lot in class. And you gave me a lot to pick on didn't you, Adam?

Anyway, what we become, what we are is we are beloved sons and daughters of the Father. That is what Baptism does. Right after we do this mass before we all stay to clean, we will sit there and we will have a Baptism. And again one of the most special things that Baptism does, is it is like God goes and then He adopts you when you get baptized. And so it isn't like God doesn't love everybody. I don't have any of my own children's but I am trying, not always perfectly, not always very well, to love everybody. So it isn't that God doesn't love everybody, of course God loves everybody but when a person is baptized God adopts some people and says to them the thing that He says to Jesus, "You are My beloved son. You are my beloved daughter." Not only does He adopt you, He calls you beloved. He says you are special. He says this is what happens.

And I believe that right after Jesus Christ heard that, what happened to Him? Do you know? Right after He heard, "You are My beloved Son, did He do? He went into the desert. For how long? 40 days and 40 nights. In there He was tempted but also in there He got to reflect on what does it mean to be God's Son? What does it mean? And throughout my life and my own personal prayer life, that is where it always comes down to. I find that I am best when I am who I am before God. I am in my identity. Where I come for my strength. That I am God's beloved son because of Jesus Christ. Instead of when I come from my own fear, my own anger, my own weakness, whatever it happens to be.

So I believe what we have to do and what God is trying to tell us on this the Feast of the Baptism is that we have to dwell and reflect every day on who we are before God. You know, when you and I come before God in our prayers and in my prayer and in your prayer we just relish in the thought that I am

God's beloved son. He loves me. Or I am God's beloved daughter. He loves me. God isn't out to get me. He loves me. And just like those of you who have children, when your children do bad, you don't stop loving them. You might kick them in the butt if they need it. But that doesn't mean you stop loving them. You want them to do good. You want them to be better. You want them to have everything you have. You want them to have joy. You want them to have peace. You would give everything for your children. How much more, God the Father, how much more when He looks at you every day and says, "You are my beloved son. You are my beloved daughter." When you and I start to reflect on that and we start living out of that instead of our weakness and our weakness and our sinfulness and the things that are not our strengths. You can always tell when I am operating out of weakness instead of who I am and for the Father. And that is for all of us. And so the key is to every day spend time in the arms of your Dad. And hear Him say you are His beloved son or daughter.

And so once you get there and you decide that is what you are going to do, I am going to spend time in the arms of my Father, knowing that I am loved. Then the one thing, after He says, "You are my beloved Son," what does He say to Jesus? "With whom I am well pleased." That when Christ came to know how much His Father loved Him as He did throughout His entire ministry, "I only want to please the Father," that once we come to know that we are loved, then all of the things we do, we don't do because of the obedience, afraid to go to hell, or I will have x years in purgatory, or Father Larry is going to yell at me - we do it because I just want to please my Father. Because I have never experienced love anywhere else as I have experienced in the arms of my Dad. And when I come to experience that love, then I want to return it. And the way I return that love is to do everything I do in my life to please my Father.

So today when we say, Our Father, you know it used to be, that wasn't the prayer for everybody. I was listening to the TV last night and they started everything with Our Father and the Our Father is everywhere and they sing it publicly you do realize that was the secret prayer of the Christian. That was not given or revealed to anybody outside of the faith until the middle of Lent. And then what was revealed to be people who had not yet been baptized they would be presented with, this is our prayer. You now get to call God your Dad forever. You are one of the family. You get to call the special prayer to God as Father. Because again especially amongst the Jews, you never called God anything but Lord. You wouldn't sit there and say the Lord. You wouldn't even write Yahweh. That is why we don't even sing Yahweh ever again in this church or in any Catholic Church in the world. The Pope forbid it. You're not allowed to say Yahweh in respect to the Jews who don't even write the word. Who don't even say the word because God is so awing and so far up there I can only come shaking before Him. Well Jesus says, "No, no, no, no. Now you can call God who you cannot even pronounce His name, you can call Him Dad forever. He calls you My son, My daughter.

So today let's commit ourselves that we start living out of our strengths. Our strength doesn't come out of ourselves. Our strength doesn't come from our identity. And our identity is we are our beloved sons and daughters. Spend time in His arms every day and then you work out of your strength not your weakness. Got it? Get it? Going to do it? Good. May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.