

The Baptism of the Lord

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Good Morning. You know, I listen to three different types of music - Country, Classical and Christian. What do you think the first number is on my car? Country. I knew you'd think that. Because all Christian music after awhile sounds the same. So does all Country as a matter of fact. But the reality is I love the lyrics of a lot of Country songs because they are real and they usually have some kind of moral unless you get into some kind of beer drinking songs which are okay too. I like one of the songs by Kenny Chesney called Down the Road. Anybody ever listen to Kenny Chesney's Down the Road? Anyway when he is singing about living life and different things and he is dating this girl, his mother says, one of the lines says the mother wants to know "have I been baptized in the blood or just the water?" "Have I been baptized in the blood or just the water? And we are not going to get into theological implications with that right now but what the question is really asking is are you entered into a relationship with Christ or did you just baptized? Now again just because you are baptized spiritually something happens to you. Your body, your soul is ontologically changed. A baptized person's soul looks all together different than an unbaptized person soul by definition, okay. But think about how many baptized people in the world today, how many people in Erie right now who are sitting home in bed at this moment because they were baptized in the water but they weren't entering into a relationship with Christ through His blood? They didn't accept it fully in their own lives.

And sometimes it can be the same with us. We get baptized we do all the right things but what Christ is calling us into is a deeper relationship. And see that is what is important about the Baptism of Christ today. That Christ wasn't baptized for Himself was He? He was baptized for whom? For us because everything that happens to Christ happens to us. And when He was baptized and the sky opened up and the Spirit descended upon Him and the Father said, "You are My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The Father said that to you and to me.

In the last weeks when I have been doing interviews for the book like the two weeks ago I had twenty interviews and they always asked, "Fr. what is the most important part of the book? Which chapter is the most important?" And everybody expects me to say chapter 3 because it talks about confession. But that is not even close to it. It is chapter 2, where it says, "Be a Man Who Lives as a Beloved Son." As an aside this Friday I am going to be down in Washington DC for the World Over on EWTN live at 8 o'clock. So if you have nothing to do and you want to go to bed early you can turn me on and listen to me for awhile and you will go right to sleep. But you are going to have to pray for me because think about how I am and this is live. So I am hoping that nothing stupid comes out of my mouth or more stupid than normal I guess. But anyway it is to talk about the book. And again, the second chapter to me is the most important because to me that is where everything begins me and everything begins with Christ. And it begins with Christ that is why it begins with me and that is why it begins with you. His whole ministry began after His baptism when He could look up and the Father could look down on Him and say, "You are My Son. You are My Son." And until we get to that place in our lives where we hear God the Father look at you and look at me and say, "You are My daughter, you are My son in whom I am well pleased."

You know I have been dealing with alcoholics my whole life. My father being one, my grandfather being one; my whole family always thinks I will become one. And who knows, one of these days if life keep going the way it is. But the reality is that you go to meetings and I have gone to literally hundreds and hundreds of AA meetings from my time with working with Fr. Peterson. I would take all the guys to the meetings at AA. And I love AA it is a good program. But in an AA meeting and some of you are in AA or NA or whatever, you get up and you say, "Hi, I am Larry. I am an alcoholic". Or, "I am a cross addict." Or I am whatever. And everybody says, "Hi Larry," and that is the way it is. I am not one now so please do not go around telling everybody, "Fr. Larry told everybody he is an alcoholic." I am not. I am just saying this is what happens at a meeting. Stop the gossip right now please. And so I have always had problems with that. Because here it is a person who has a poor self image to begin with and then they put this label on themselves for all eternity. Sometimes whenever they meet you, and I have met many alcoholics and addicts, and they come up to me and that is how they introduce themselves to me. "Hi Fr. I am an alcoholic." And I always want to reply, "Huh? That is your label that you have chosen to put on yourself is your weakness? That thing that makes you weak, that is your label you choose for yourself?" Or your sexuality, or your whatever your reality is, that is what you are going to label yourself with, your weakness? Excuse me, I don't agree. What you are if you want to label yourself anything is God's beloved son who has a problem with alcohol. Or God's beloved daughter who has a problem with food. You don't label yourself your disease or your illness or your weakness, you label yourself who you are and put into perspective those things you struggle with. Every one of us here has struggles. But don't define yourself by your struggle; define yourself by the God of the Universe who calls you His son or daughter. And when you start focusing on the positive of your life that you are beloved of the Father - you are beloved of the Father. He is pleased with you in spite of your weakness, in spite of your struggles. And He is here to help you.

Again, a lot comes around to the book, I know, but the next phase of it is to go out and to reach out to the secular press. And so they put together a plan together and to put it out and use Tiger Woods. Look at what Tiger Woods did. And because of all the things he did, he wasn't being a real man. And I am sitting there and I wrote them and I said, "Please do not use Tiger Woods. I don't want to use someone else's sin to sell a book." And they wrote back and they said, "Well Father, you know, we have to capitalize on all these things." They did not agree so we had this big meeting with Ignatius Press in San Francisco and we have an hour long conference call. We are going back and forth. And I said, "Listen, I do not want to use someone else's sin to do that. And to do that is a sin of detraction." And they said, "Well Father don't you know that to do these types of promotions we have to strike while the iron is hot." And I said, "And don't you know that God is in control and He is not going to allow us to use sin." We are going back and forth. And I said, "I want my book to give hope to people like Tiger Woods. Not to jump on the bandwagon and say that he is as bad as everyone else." And see that is the difference. We are here to give Good News to people. And sometimes they need a kick in the butt. I do that quite well. But we need to give people hope and it begins with knowing who you are. And this beloved son stuff and beloved daughter stuff, makes you a member of the family.

This past week since I could not go to Europe, I spent the week out at my house. And everybody thought that is great Father. It was one of the most horrendous experiences of my life. I hate being alone. It is just that simple. I hated it. I was like twiddling my thumbs thinking "another day." I was sitting there thinking, "If I wasn't a priest I would go out of my mind." Just completely out of my minds sitting out there. Out there I have temporarily of course until I get the Bishop's permission; I have the tabernacle there while I was out there so I could do my holy hour every day. I would go up there and just

spend time with the Lord and it was only there that I didn't feel lonely when I was in His presence. Again what happens is, you and I are truly never alone. We are a member of the family. We are beloved to the Father. That when He looks at you coming into His presence just the very fact that you are coming into His presence, it makes Him smile. Think about how many people don't, could care less, that even you in your weakness, even me in my weakness, me in my sinfulness, to still want to be with Him. A smile goes from ear to ear from the Father because at least we desire, we want to be with Him. And when we desire and we come in to where we are in Him then everything flows out of that. But what happens is most of us never reach that reality in our life knowing who you are as a beloved son or a beloved daughter. So we come out of our weaknesses, we come out of our sins. We act out of those things instead of who we truly are.

So this is what I would encourage you to do for this week, not this week... you know we are going to give everybody holy water and in my family never in my life, my family was a pagan family and we always had holy water around the house, always. My mother didn't like thunderstorms most particularly. And so when we were kids we always light blessed candles and we would always have holy water and bless everybody. It was kind of superstitious but that is okay. The reality is still, you go in my office and there is holy water. You go in my bar, and there is holy water and not the kind you are thinking. There's really holy water there at the bar. And so the reality is as Theresa of Avila use to say, "Holy water can chase the devil away that he never comes back. He is more afraid of this than anything else." Why, because it reminds us who we really are. It reminds us that the devil doesn't have power over you. You are God's beloved son. You are God's beloved daughter. You are a son; you are a prince or a princess of the Kingdom. The devil is nothing. You have no reason to be afraid of him. So when you take this holy water and you bless your family, you can always get holy water in the back, and when you bless yourself as we have talked about before, when you bless yourself especially with holy water it is like the Spirit of God takes you and lifts you up and brings you into the community, the family of God. That at that moment you are not alone.

So this week I would encourage you spend time alone with the Father. Let Him say to you, "You are my beloved son or daughter." And focus on that reality. So you act and you live out of your own strength not out of your weakness. You got it? You get it? Going to do it? May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.