

January 12, 2020 – Baptism of the Lord - Cycle A  
Father Larry Richards

Good Morning! How are you? Today we end the Christmas season which is always sad. Some of you already ended the Christmas season weeks ago but that's all beside the point. The Church ends it today but it ends it with a new beginning where we focus on the Baptism of Jesus Christ. When we do that, we hear today from Matthew's gospel. In Matthew's gospel, it says, "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." I was in Sioux Falls, South Dakota this Friday and Saturday and when I left Sioux Falls yesterday, it was minus 5 degrees, minus 5 degrees. When I got off the plane in the airport in Pittsburgh, it was 69 degrees. So weird! Then I called my buddy out in San Diego where it was only 50 degrees. In Las Vegas, it's only 44 degrees and it was 70 yesterday in Erie but that has nothing to do with the homily. Except, the reality is the new beginnings that God gives all of us. When Jesus was baptized, He was already God from all eternity – He was God. Yet, in His humanity, God reveals the Father deeply to Him what that means in His humanity when He says, "This is my Son" or in Mark's gospel, Chapter 1, Verse 11 which I spoke to the kids in South Dakota because you also are God's beloved son with whom He is well pleased.

So, why that's important is that the baptism of Jesus, He who did not need baptism as He said clearly and John the Baptist said, "Let it be done." Why – to show us what happens when we get baptized. A baptism is an adoption that just as Jesus was baptized and God the Father looked at Him and said, "You are my son who I love and I'm pleased with you", every one of us when we got baptized, God the Father looked at you, looked at me and said, "You are my beloved daughter. You are my beloved son. You're the one I love and I'm pleased with you." Often we say, well I wish I could go back to then, Father, because I was so good then, didn't do anything wrong. Now He's not pleased with me.

You see, that's the problem. We gotta go back to the core of who we are and that's what I spoke at with these kids. Again, most people just think nasty things about themselves, you know. They think that when they do that, that is a humility thing but it's not a humility thing when you think nasty things about yourself, it's an insult to your Father, right? He created you out of love to be love in a world that doesn't know love. He created you as His beloved son or daughter and when you're constantly looking at yourself that you're nothing but a piece of garbage, you're saying He created garbage or that He didn't create it, you became it. Well He's redeemed it. If you were such a piece of garbage, then He wouldn't come and live inside of you. If you were such a piece of garbage, then you could never receive communion, right? Yet, He decides to come inside of you. If you were such a piece of garbage, He would have never died on the cross for your sins. You are beloved to God and you gotta spend time with that because again, my degree is in counseling if you remember before I went to get my major degree in Theology. In counseling, I always liked rational emotive therapy. It was always my therapy that I focused on. There is many. There is Rogerian therapy and there is all this stuff. I don't buy any of it. I only like the one – be surprised. Rational Emotive Therapy says, what you think is what you feel, right?

So, if you think you're a piece of garbage then what do you feel like – a piece of garbage. If you think you are just a sinner then all you are focused on is just your sinfulness. What that does is keep you focused

on yourself. That's not of God. That just isn't of God. I promise you it's not of God and you're gonna have people who are telling you opposite. I'm telling you that's not of God. That's not what the baptism of Christ celebrates today.

The baptism of Christ celebrates that Jesus is the Son of God and that when we get baptized, we get adopted by God and we too, become God's sons and daughters. That means we are loved and that means that He is pleased with us and it's that which stops us from sinning. Have you ever noticed that when you give in, those of us who struggle with sin, but when you struggle with particular sin and you give into it, then you feel bad and you say, "I'm just a piece of garbage. I'm not good. I'm just a great sinner" and what do you do? You sin again, right? You get caught up in that cycle of sin because you do something that makes you feel bad. Now you do something bad and now you do something to try to make yourself feel good and it just makes you feel worse and then you do it again, and again, and again because you're constantly trying to fill up the emptiness inside and the devil lies to you and says, "Sin is gonna make you feel better." Does it ever?

No! But if you experience the love of God; if you experience that everything you go to pray He looks at you and says, "You're my beloved. I'm pleased with you" then you're never gonna corrupt yourself with the garbage of sin because you already feel fulfilled inside. You already know who you are. You experience the love of God; then every sin is nothing but a piece of garbage and you don't want to be garbage. See that's the key. Do you experience yourself as nothing but a miserable sinner and a piece of garbage or do you experience yourself as a beloved son or daughter of God. The second, when you always focus on your sinfulness, you're always gonna be sinning because you are always trying to fill up the emptiness.

It comes from this past week when His letter to John says that those begotten of God do not sin. God has protected them. Why? Because they know who they are. 98% of people, I believe, in the church have no clue who they are. They have listened to the wrong person; not to God – to the evil one that you are nothing but a sinner which gives you the OK to keep sinning. When you hear the Father look at you and say, "You also are my beloved daughter. You also are my beloved son. I love you and I'm pleased with you, then you'll want to please Him back. The last line of the second reading was beautiful because what does it mean when you and I realize who we are before God. We do the same thing Jesus did. Right – again in John's gospel it says, "You see the things I do, I tell you." Now, how many of us believe this? You will do the things I do and greater things than these. So, Jesus says that you're gonna do what He did and greater things than He did. That's what Jesus said. You want to call him a liar? He's right there. Go ahead. You tell Him. You're nothing but a liar Jesus. You tell Him.

Jesus said you'll do that, why – because I go to the Father. Why – because you too are sons and daughters. He lives inside of us. We gotta start having good things and thoughts about God because if now, when we're just filled with this garbage inside of ourselves, we treat others like garbage because I'm not worth anything and neither are they. They're just sinners like me. Isn't that great? Is that the way we want to be? Is that the call from God for us to be like that? I think not. This is what He says, in

the Acts it says, "What did Jesus do? He went about doing good and healing those who were oppressed by the devil for God was with Him."

Is God with us? So, what should we be doing? We should be about doing good and healing those who are oppressed by the devil. Now oppressed by the devil means those who are in bondage of sin. Our job is to bring healing to them, to set them free. Again, that means that we gotta experience truly being set free. Today I want to encourage you to spent time with Jesus at His baptism; to hear God the Father say to you, "You are my son or my daughter. I love you and I'm pleased with you." And then get about doing good and setting others free, too.

You got it? You get it? You gonna do it? May each of you know His love today and forever. Amen.