

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

The Baptism of the Lord | For Sunday, January 10, 2021

An Exhortation: Choose to Live Like Christ

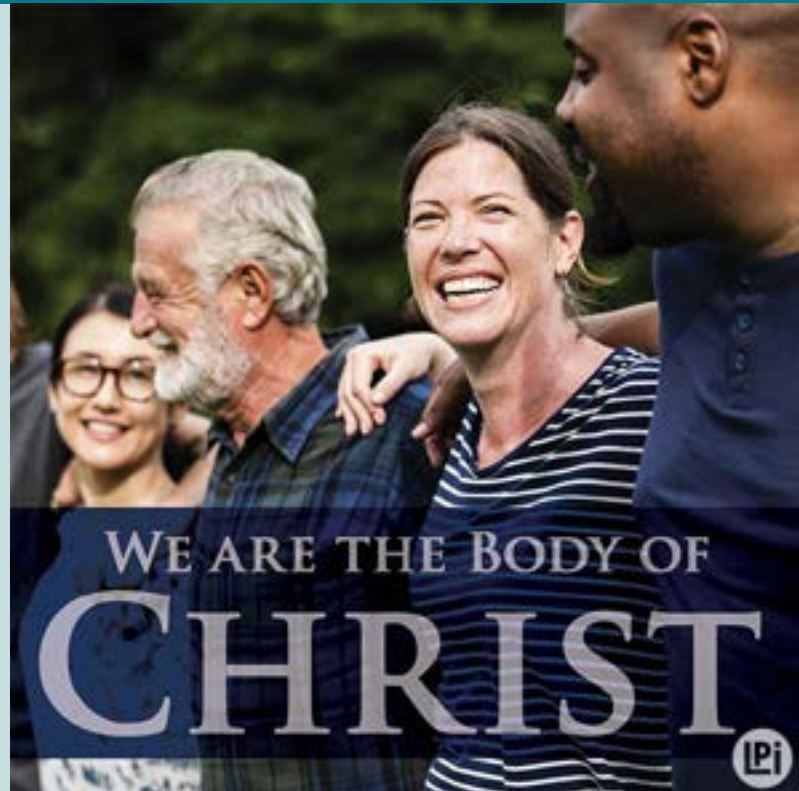
Written by Fr. Mark Suslenko

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7

Or Isaiah 55:1-11

Acts 10:34-38 Or 1 John 5:1-9

Mark 1:7-11



Our faith must be brought into the streets. It cannot remain locked up in a church or limited to expressions of personal piety. Pope Francis reminds us in *The Joy of the Gospel* that “we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others.” Jesus’ baptism provides him with exactly what he needs to get about the business of his mission as the Son of God, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” He is given what he needs to be successful in fulfilling the purpose for which he was sent. Our baptisms give us these same gifts. We receive the affirmation we need from God, knowing that we are one of his beloved daughters and sons. It is through our baptisms that we are gifted with the direction and clear purpose we need in order to be productive stewards and faithful Christians. It is not solely about our eternal salvation. In baptism, we receive what we need to be successful in fulfilling our purpose and laboring for the kingdom of God. Baptism is ultimately about putting on Christ and choosing to live like Christ in the world. This means putting Jesus’ command to love at the forefront of our lives. Are we ready and willing to answer the call?

Baptism is the Easter mystery made flesh in our lives, reminding us of who we are called to be, and the kind of world God designed for our use. It is because of this truth that Pope Francis can say that “we have a treasure of life and love which cannot deceive and a message which cannot mislead or disappoint. It penetrates to the depths of our hearts, sustaining and ennobling us. It is a truth which is never out of date because it reaches that part of us which nothing else can reach. Our infinite sadness can only be cured by infinite love.” Many are experiencing a great depth of infinite sadness. They are lost and without a true shepherd. They have no real axis in their lives and do not know how to frame the choices they make or purify their thoughts and feelings. It is, quite frankly, a mess. We need to help our world move forward and find a greener pasture beyond the sadness. We can powerfully witness to this by moving beyond our own sadness and embracing hope. Baptism tells us who we are and assures us that we are on a much bigger journey. This is good news indeed!

But we cannot move forward by cancelling our past or erasing its memory. History is important. We need it in order to understand ourselves, personally and collectively. The pieces of our histories may not always have been the most positive, honest, exemplary, dignified, proud, and best moments of our lives, but they are ours. We must

acknowledge, remember, accept, and often heal them. We certainly cannot forget them or pretend that they never existed. The times when humanity in general, and people in particular, have lost their way are the very times that need to be reconciled and redeemed. Baptized people can speak to this need and help with this healing. We are reminded through the voices and example of many prophets and witnesses not to make the same mistakes again, come back to center, discover the purpose given to us by God, maintain a sense of proper direction, seek healing for wounds, and be reconciled with our Creator. We need a conscience. This is only accomplished by having a strong relationship with God, being informed and enlightened by good, solid teaching, living a good moral life, being persons of integrity, and discerning the path to virtuous, Gospel centered decisions. Do we bring a well formed conscience to our daily choices?

Baptism is so incredibly important for the salvation of humankind, not only eternally, but here and now. Our existence depends upon it. The Gospel, ratified in us through baptism, anchors us in the God given virtues of faith, hope, and love. It orients us to truth and that truth brings joy. It is only through baptism that we can remember, accept, and deal with the sins and inequities of our past regardless of how hurtful and serious. We consciously choose to turn away from them and put on the new life of Christ. To do this well, we must look hard and long at our sins and failings, listen to what they are saying and learn from them. If we ignore the past, collectively or personally, or pretend that it never happened, we will never grow. We will surely die. It is amazing that when we actually put on Christ so much changes! We learn to resolve our conflicts peacefully and without recourse to violence. Restoring relationships that are broken or distorted becomes a priority and securing a means for all people to achieve reasonable happiness in this world becomes the lens through which we see when conducting business.

People need to hear the message, lived and spoken, delivered by the baptized members of the Body of Christ. It is an essential message of hope that is layered with visions of justice, peace, reconciliation, redemption, blessing, and healing. It is a message that helps us remember what has gone before, the graces and the sins, and bring ourselves by God's help where we need to be. We are called to do much more than sit home behind our closed doors. We have a message to deliver. The challenge comes in accepting the risk of preaching the Gospel. While we may have all we need in our baptism to do so, we have to find the willingness within to actually pull it off. We have to be willing to move from just giving lip service to our brothers and sisters throughout the world and actually relating to them as spiritual siblings.

We cannot ignore the immigrant, the migrant, the orphan, the cold, the hungry or the sinner. We cannot continue to choose the protection of life when it suits us and its demise when it doesn't. We cannot continue to run

roughshod over God's creation. God continues to try to heal what God has made. We have to help this along, not work against it. Human life has dignity and things like human trafficking, prejudice, severe unemployment, violence, greed, lust for power, and corruption cannot continue. We need to help those who have no voice find one.

This is the beauty of being the Body of Christ collectively. The responsibility for the mission of the Gospel does not fall on any one person. It does, however, require that all of the baptized members of that Body realize who they are and take their faith to the streets. Our credibility depends upon doing this successfully. We also need to support one another as we strive to achieve God's vision. Our political systems are broken, people are lost and hurting and there is great sadness across the globe. It is all too easy to mistake what is purported as being politically correct with ultimate truth, forgetting that there are principles and ideals that need to be in place to effectively govern our lives. We will face more difficult times before it gets better. But we have a hope with us that the world cannot give. It is our identity in God sealed in our baptism that assures us that God is with us and will use us to heal God's world. Are we ready to do so?

Fr. Mark Suslenko

PRAYER

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hail Mary, full of grace,
blessed are you among women and
blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners now and
at the hour of our death. Amen.

Lord you left your Mother in our midst
that she might accompany us.
May she take care of us and protect us
on our journey, in our hearts, in our faith.
May she make us disciples like herself,
missionaries like herself.
May she teach us to go out onto the streets.
May she teach us to step outside ourselves.
May she, by her meekness, by her peace,
show us the way. Amen.

-Pope Francis, [*Prayer at conclusion of meeting with young people from Argentina, 7/25/13*](#)