

The Baptism of the Lord – Jan. 12-13, 2019
St. Mary's Church, Richmond VA
Fr. Michael Renninger

“Who are you?”

Several years ago I was visiting an elderly parishioner. Dementia had robbed her of her memories. Occasionally, she might recognize the face of one of her children, but she could no longer remember names.

Her daughter asked me to go with her to visit her mother. So when we arrived, we both greeted her with cheerfulness in our voices. But she looked confused. She kept staring at the face of her daughter, as if she knew that she should recognize her. Finally, the older woman looked at her daughter and said, “Who are you?”

Her daughter replied, “I’m Ellen.”

Then the older woman asked, “And who am I?”

Ellen responded, “You’re name is Frances, and you’re my mom!” And with that, a smile came across the woman’s face. For a few moments, she remembered. She knew her daughter. And more importantly, she knew who she herself was. She remembered.

In today’s Gospel, the Father of Jesus speaks from the skies. And the voice of the Father tells Jesus – *this* is who you are. “You are my beloved son. With you I am well pleased.” *That’s* who Jesus is. He always remembers.

Jesus knows who he is. He is the beloved son of God. He lives his life in such a way that people can SEE who he is, and SEE who loves him!

So, when the Pharisees called him a sinner – he was able to say: “No I’m not. I am beloved son of God!”

When the Sadducees called him a threat, he was able to say: “no I’m not. I am a beloved son of God.”

When some members of his own family said that he was out of his mind (Mark 3:21), he was able to say: “no I’m not. I am a beloved son of God.”

When the demons said to Jesus: “you are powerless in the face of illness and disease,” he said: “no I’m not! I am a beloved son of God.” And he cured the sick.

When the pessimists said to Jesus: “you are incapable of feeding all these hungry folks,” he said: “no I’m not! I am a beloved son of God.” And he fed the multitudes.

When the accusers said to Jesus: “you are unworthy to forgive sins,” he said, “no I’m not! I am a beloved son of God.” And he forgave every sinner.

When the chief priests called him a rebel and a criminal, he said, “no I’m not. I am a beloved son of God!” And he withstood their falsehoods.

And when Death came creeping up Calvary’s hill, grabbed hold of Jesus, and said, “You’re *mine* now.” Jesus said, “No I’m not! I am a beloved son of God!” And he *rose from the dead!*

I don’t know if Jesus ever had to ask the Heavenly Father, “who am I?” But Jesus certainly LIVED his life like a beloved child of God. *Jesus did not forget.*

But I do. I forget, sometimes, that I am a baptized follower of Jesus Christ. I forget that, on the day of my baptism, the Lord said to me, “Michael, you are my beloved child.” I forget who I am.

So, in my words, actions and decisions, I often behave like someone who has forgotten that I belong to Christ, and that God will never abandon me.

Some days, my actions and words don’t reflect the life of a child of God. They so often reflect my refusal to believe the promise that God made to me in baptism – the promise renewed every morning. “You are my beloved child. I love you. I always will. That’s who you are. *Remember.*”

How would my life change, how would my thoughts and actions change, if I paused throughout the day to remember who I am?

How would my dreams and priorities change, if I trusted that God’s words, spoken through Isaiah the prophet, are actually spoken to me? “Here is my servant whom I uphold. I the Lord have grasped *you* by the hand and created *you* to be a light for the nations!” *That’s* who you are!

When I forget, that’s when my behavior becomes sinful and scared. But on this feast of the Baptism of the Lord, you are reminded: *You* are God’s beloved daughter and son. You are loved beyond your imagining. You are precious in God’s sight. What would happen if you remembered that throughout the day?

If people said to you, “You are messed up, you’re good for nothing,” you could say, “No I’m not. I am a beloved child of God.”

If people said, “You are only as valuable as your pay check and your next promotion,” You can say, “No I’m not. I am a beloved child of God, and I have a dignity that no one can take away from me.”

If people tell you, “You’ll never be good enough. No one will love you. You have to put up with bad relationships because you’ll never find someone to love you.” You can say, “that’s not true. I am a beloved child of God”

If people tell you that you are too insignificant to make a difference in the world; that you are powerless over hunger, poverty, violence and injustice. Stand up. Remember who you are! You are so valuable in God’s sight that he sent his son to die for you! You can change your world!

If your fears tell you that you will never be able to forgive; that you will always pass judgment on people; that you will never be able to *be* better toward others: *Remember who you are.*

You are a beloved child of God. The person right in front of you is a child of God too. The person you call your enemy is a child of God. And that same God can teach you how to love one another.

If sickness and suffering are telling you that you are hopeless. If struggles and sins are telling you that you are futureless. If your deep dark secrets are telling you that you are faithless; and if the thought of your own mortality is making you joyless - Stand up! Remember who you are, and say “I’m not hopeless. I’m not futureless or faithless or joyless!”

“I am a beloved child of God... Baptized in water and the Holy Spirit... Sharing in the dying of Christ, so that I can share in his rising. Filled with the Holy Spirit, so that I can experience God’s love now, and see God face to face forever.”

That’s who you are... you baptized, beloved children of God. Believe it. Act like it. Remember it. Live it.

Don’t forget it.