

FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD
JANUARY 10, 2021

Good morning!

It is nice to see all of you in person. The last gathering that we were all here was on Christmas eve; and today is the last day of Christmas season. It is nice to be together again especially after witnessing the unsettling events in our country these past weeks. The recent events that have occurred in our nation's capital have been very disturbing for many of us. The past few days have made me feel uncertain and have caused many of us to experience stress and confusion. And so here we gather in a beautiful garden to celebrate the Mass. It is comforting to know that the church can be a place to come to for relief. The teachings and messages are a source of peace for us. These state of disorder, lawlessness, division, and turmoil have confirmed our reliance on God alone. Only in God that we can find truth, integrity, and honesty. And so we come today for reconciliation and healing for our beloved country.

So, as we celebrate the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, I would like to share with you a story of the life of Sally Read.

Sally Read was raised an atheist. She saw no need for God or religion during her childhood and adult life.

All that began to change when she was doing research for a book she was writing. She met a priest, Father Gregory, whom she interviewed when she wanted to include some religious views in her book. In the course of her work with him, they became friends. Their friendship made her more curious about the Christian faith and she would turn to Fr. Gregory often when she had a question about religion.

Around that time, she married an Italian man and moved to a small town outside of Rome. They had a daughter together and she continued her work as a novelist and poet.

As she settled into her new life, anxiety began to build up. Her husband was struggling in his job which was creating a lot of stress in their home. Her daughter also began to experience some health issues which added even more pressure. It got to the point that Sally just couldn't take it anymore. She didn't know where to turn for help. One day, she decided to walk into the small Catholic Church in their town. Through her tears, she looked at an icon of Jesus and said, "If you are there, you have to help me."

This is how she described what happened next: "There was this incredible experience where this presence almost came down, and my tears just stopped, just dried. I felt almost physically carried up. It was as if someone walked into the room. I knew this person. I knew that I was a Christian."

From that point onward, whenever she felt the stress and anxiety start to overwhelm her, she would go back to that church and the sense of peace would envelop her again.

The more she prayed, the more it became clear to her that what she most wanted was to be in union with this God of peace. And she knew she could only attain that by receiving Jesus in Holy Communion.

And so, in December 2012, she was received into the Catholic Church.

Sally Read's experience gets to the heart of the feast we are celebrating today. Jesus wants to reveal Himself to us. He is near to us and wants to give us all the blessings He has to offer - forgiveness, peace, joy, and love. If we seek Him out with open and sincere hearts, He will show Himself to us. He is only a prayer away.

We see this powerfully in today's gospel.

Jesus is standing at the shore of the Jordan River along with hundreds of other people. However, it is clear that He is different. He doesn't need to repent of any sin. He doesn't need a radical change of heart. That is why John the Baptist tries to stop Him and says, "I need to be baptized by you!" However, Jesus goes ahead with it anyway. Why? Because He wants to reveal Himself to John and to everyone who had gathered at the Jordan River that day. He wanted to show who He really is so that people would believe in Him.

And what happens? As He rises up from the water, God the Holy Spirit is revealed, coming down from heaven in the form of a dove. God the Father is revealed in a thundering voice. And it is God the Father who proclaims, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." God Himself - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - shows Himself in no uncertain terms in all His glory to John the Baptist, to all of those who had gathered there, and to us who hear this gospel today.

God wants us to know Him. He wants to enter into a personal and intimate relationship with us. And, He wants us to spend eternity with Him in heaven. He reaches out His hand to every single person. All we have to do is grasp it and follow Him.

If life has become burdensome for you, if it seems as though you have lost your way, if nothing makes sense to you anymore, call out to Jesus. He is here and He wants to help you. Sally Read's simple prayer, "if you are there, you have to help me," is all you need to say. No matter how you may have lived your life to this point, it can all change today. In fact, it is precisely for sinners that Jesus came to earth, died on the cross, and rose again. He will not turn away anyone who comes to Him with faith, even if it's just a little faith. He will respond. It might not be in the way we expect, but it will be clear and it will be exactly what we need.

In today's gospel, God reveals Himself in a dramatic and powerful way. However, for most people, it does not happen that way. Instead, God usually reaches out to people through other people. Just as Fr. Gregory's friendship with Sally Read began to open her heart to the possibility that God exists, so it is through our relationships with others that we experience God's love and show it to others.

There is a saying that is very true: "You may be the only Christ someone meets today." God will speak to us through other people. Our ears have to be open to hear it. God wants to speak to others through us. Our tongues must be ready to speak words of hope and consolation.

Today we celebrate a God who reveals Himself to the world through Jesus Christ, His beloved Son. It is through the sacrament of Baptism that we become His beloved daughters and sons. Let us call out to Him with faith and live with confidence knowing that He is by our side providing for us every step of our way.