

Baptism of the Lord - C
Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11;
Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7;
Luke 3:15-16, 21-22
Little Flower - 1/13/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Today's Gospel tells the story of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. At Jesus' baptism, God the Father authenticated Jesus as his beloved Son. Jesus' baptism was one of only three times that we hear the voice of God the Father in the New Testament. Prior to Jesus' baptism, John prophesied about Jesus, "*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*"

Therefore, when we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, we are also remembering and celebrating our own Baptism. In today's second reading, St. Paul refers to our baptism: "*He saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...*" To live our baptism is to live as Jesus lived.

One of the primary purposes of a parish council is to do strategic planning for the parish. Our parish council is currently engaged in strategic planning. To help us in our planning, we are reading and discussing Fr. James Mallon's book *Divine Renovation: Bringing your parish from maintenance to mission*. In this book, Fr. Mallon challenges us to live our vocation as missionary disciples. To live our vocation as missionary disciples is to make our own Jesus' threefold mission.

When those of us who are older were growing up, the responsibility for the mission of the church rested almost exclusively on the priests and sisters. The role of the laity, as the old saying went, was to "pray, pay, and obey." However, the Second Vatican Council rediscovered the priesthood of the faithful shared by all Christians by virtue of their baptism.

As a result, there was a new emphasis on lay leadership in parishes. Consultative bodies like parish councils, boards of education, liturgy commissions, to name just a few, arose. As the numbers of priests declined, more lay people were hired by parishes to exercise various ministries. As you know, Angie Mackell is our director of stewardship and administration, Peggy Clegg is our pastoral associate for health and senior ministries, and Tom Costello is our music director. Also, the number of parish ministries expanded, and the number of volunteer ministers grew exponentially. Little Flower continues to be blessed with many wonderful, generous parishioners who are very engaged in parish life and ministries.

Unfortunately, too many Christians and Catholics do not recognize their personal vocation and responsibility to carry on the ministry and mission of Jesus not only within church and the parish community but within all the communities of which they are part. I have often said that I spend approximately 99% of my time with Catholics, those wanting to become Catholic, and those wanting to marry Catholics. You are the ones who primarily interact with non-Christians and non-Catholics in the larger world. You are the ones, then, who are called to make a difference beyond the boundaries of the church and parish by living Jesus' three-fold mission.

My brothers and sisters, Jesus was a prophet, priest, and shepherd-king. It seems to me that the first reading references each of these. It refers to Jerusalem as the herald of good news, the expiation of guilt, and God as a shepherd. Jesus' threefold mission was to teach, sanctify, and lead. We all have a vocation and responsibility to share the Good News of Jesus Christ both by word and example, to be healers, reconcilers, and peace-makers, and to be Christian leaders in word and example in every part of our lives. Jesus is the sacrament of God. In other words, Jesus is the sign and realization of God's presence in the world. The Church is the sacrament of Jesus. In other words, the Church is the sign and realization of Jesus' presence in the world, and we are the Church, the hands and feet of Jesus today.