

2nd Sunday per Annum - A
Isaiah 49:3, 5-6;
I Corinthians 1:1-3;
John 1:29-34
Little Flower - 1/15/23

My Brothers and Sisters,

Most years, we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord on the Sunday after Epiphany, which is today. However, when Christmas and the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, fall on Sunday, the feast of the Baptism of the Lord is celebrated on the Monday following the Epiphany. However, this year, in today's Gospel, John the Baptist testifies to Jesus' baptism.

A fish was an early Christian symbol. One reason for this is that the letters of the Greek word for fish, *ichthus*, represent "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior." At the beginning of today's Gospel, John the Baptist proclaims, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.*" As the sacrificial Lamb of God, Jesus is messiah and savior because he took away the sin of the world by his death. John concluded his testimony with "*Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God.*" Therefore, in today's Gospel, John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus Son of God and Savior.

Also, in this passage, John the Baptist states that the one coming after him ranks ahead of him because he existed before him. One of the themes of the Fourth Gospel is that the Son of God preexisted the man Jesus. In other words, although Jesus was conceived and born in time, the Son of God existed from all eternity as the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity.

In today's Gospel, John the Baptist contrasts his baptism with the baptism of Jesus. As we read in the other Gospels, John's baptism was a baptism of water for the forgiveness of sins while Jesus' baptism was a baptism with the Holy Spirit. Although John contrasts his baptism with water and Jesus' baptism with the Holy Spirit, our theology of baptism includes both. We believe that just as water is life giving and cleanses, we believe that the waters of baptism give us the Holy Spirit, sanctifying grace, the gift of God's life and love, and wash away original sin and all sins.

At his baptism, Jesus was authenticated or validated by the words of the Father and by the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon him. We only hear the voice of God the Father three times in the Gospels. One of those times was at Jesus' baptism: "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*" [Mt. 3:17]. In John's Gospel, John the Baptist testifies that he witnessed the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus and that the Father told him Jesus was the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit.

Today's reading from Isaiah comes from the Second Song of the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. Through Isaiah God proclaims Israel to be that servant. However, with the lens of Christian faith, we believe Jesus to be the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. As Jesus himself said, "*Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many*" [Mt. 20:28].

More interesting, God also says through Isaiah, "*It is too little, he says, for you to be my servant... I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.*" As light to the nations, Jesus leads his people to God. Jesus, then, is a servant leader. As Christians, we too are called to be servant leaders, leaders who have servant hearts and lead primarily by service.

My brothers and sisters, in the introduction to his First Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul reminds the members of the Church in Corinth that they are called to be holy. As Catholics, we believe that the fundamental vocation of every Christian is to become holy. For Matthew Kelly "the quest for holiness and the quest to become the-best-version-of-yourself" are one and the same. As he would say, God has an incredible dream for each and every one of us: he wants us to become the-best-version-of-ourselves.