

Homily 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year A 15th January 2017

On Monday of last week we celebrated the feast of The Baptism of Our Lord. Today in this Year of Mathew we hear the central theme of John's account of Jesus's encounter with John the Baptist. Baptism is a Greek word meaning to immerse, indeed in the early Church all catechumenates, as the candidates for Baptism were known, received Baptism by total immersion in the Baptismal Font. The symbolism being; in their immersion in the waters of Baptised they died with Christ to their sinful self, and in the rising from the water they rose with Christ to new life.

Water is the thing that springs to mind when I think about Baptism. In fact I tell parents in Baptismal preparation that if the water is not poured over the baby's head while the celebrant says; "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" ask for a refund because your baby is not Baptised. So water is as essential for Baptism as it is for life. Our bodies in fact contain somewhere between 50% and 65% water. Tragically this Summer holiday period water the giver of life has also claimed

some 20 lives. Something most water safety commentators emphasise is the need to swim with a group. The advice given by the legendary George Greenough, the guy who invented the bodyboard is if you want to reduce your chance of being the victim of a shark attack by 50% surf with a mate. We are safer in numbers. Just as we are being told that going for a swim in a river, lake or at a surf beach is not just about grabbing a towel, sun screen and swimmers if we want to stay safe and enjoy our swim we have to prepare know the dangers and swim between the flags. Baptism is more than just pouring water over the baby's head. In fact the Franciscan Friar Fr Richard Rohr observed we have been pouring water over people's heads for 2000 years with little appreciable effect on humanity. If you doubt Rohr observation think about this; we belong to a species that has killed 160 million people in war in the last century. That's an average of 4,380 people killed per day for a 100 years. I don't know about you but that figure leaves me speechless, 4,380 men, women and children killed every day. Clearly what we are doing is not working. The message of Baptism is in fact unchanged since the time of Christ and John the Baptist. I have two distinct

choices; I can either live in a world governed by the survival of the fittest or I can embrace Christ message and live in His Kingdom. The challenge of Baptism is beautifully illustrated by a saying from the Jewish Hassidic tradition: “The great question is not is there life after death but is there life before death.”

If I’m to understand my Baptism in the context of my life, my here and now, a good place to start is to ask the question: What is the difference between the Baptisms I will celebrate at St Michael’s this morning and John’s baptism? A simple answer would be to say that I will celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism, Christian Baptism. But what does that mean. A clue can be found in that famous quote from Matthew “Prepare the way for the Lord” (Matt 3:3). John’s baptism is about preparing the way. His baptism was about preparing the Jewish people for the coming Messiah by washing away their sins. John’s baptism pointed to something. That something was Christian Baptism. John’s baptism was about preparing for Christ Kingdom, Christian Baptism admits me into Christ Kingdom. By our Baptism we become members of the Mystical Body of Christ, Christ dwells in us and us in Him. Baptism brings us into the Church community. A

community described in Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church as "a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." You see not only am I called into a personal relationship with Christ through my Baptism but I'm also called into a personal relationship with all creation. I know this is a difficult concept to grasp the Christ who dwells in me by virtue of my Baptism dwells in all people whether they acknowledge it or not. And, just as Christ calls us all into relationship we are all called to be one in Christ.

If we want to live in Christ's Kingdom here and now we simply must acknowledge Christ in the other in our family, in our workplaces, in traffic jams, in our lives. My wife has this annoying saying: "Where is the 'us' in that!" As difficult as it is we need to acknowledge it's not about me it's all about us. If we want to stop the carnage in our society if we want to have life before death we have to acknowledge it's all about us. Our Baptism gives us a clear set of flags to swim between if we want to survive as a species we better start swimming between those flags now.

Books you might find interesting:

The Sacrament of Baptism by Michael G. Witczak in the Lex Orandi series published by Liturgical Press.

Sacrament, The Christian Mysteries by John Main published by Medio Media

One Baptism, Ecumenical Dimensions of the Doctrine of Baptism by Susan K. Wood published by Liturgical Press.