

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

Dear Parishioners:

It has been my experience as a priest that some people have a very misguided understanding of God. Whether as a result of having human fathers who were not very loving or because they've been exposed to preaching of the extreme "fire and brimstone" variety, some people believe that they can never please God. To them God appears always ready to punish us and that He sets us up to fail. However, the lesson this feast day of the Baptism of the Lord teaches us is that God is just the opposite. Indeed, what God the Father says of Jesus in the Gospel reading today, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," He also says of us. When you were baptized you became God's beloved sons and daughters in whom your Heavenly Father is well pleased. Recognizing the parallels between the baptism Jesus receives from John & the baptism Christ gives to us can help us to understand the true Fatherhood of God and our relationship to Him as His children. And this message is an essential part of the Gospel, the good news proclaimed by Jesus Christ.

The Gospel tells us that before beginning his public ministry, Jesus went down to the Jordan River one day to be baptized by John. In doing so He took on our likeness and identified with us. He also took upon Himself the burden of our sins, a burden that had separated us from God from the time of Adam's sin. As John said, Jesus became the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He did this by carrying our sins to the cross. Because we have been baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ we receive the remission of original sin — that tendency to make ourselves into gods & disobey God our Father. We also receive the grace to overcome the temptation to sin. Just as Christ took on our likeness, through the Sacrament of Baptism He enables us to become like Him.

At His Baptism, God the Father declared "This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased." At our Baptism, we became the adopted children of God and were born again into supernatural life. As others have said, it is true that *God loves us as we are but He loves us too much to leave us there*. So, through the saving merits of Jesus Christ, and by the sacrament of baptism He raises us up to be His beloved sons and daughters. We should never forget that the Lord has made us His children, and we should be assured of His love for us. But that doesn't mean as some would have it that God is simply a warm teddy bear who agrees with every choice we make. We do have the right to choose. We also have the ability to choose wrong. That is why God our Father gave us His commandments to guide us so that we can live up to our dignity as His children.

St. Matthew also tells us that at His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus as a sign that the Spirit was with Christ and would strengthen Him in His mission. At our Baptism, the Holy Spirit enters our lives & empowers us to live lives worthy of the children of God. The Holy Spirit leads us in the ways of Christ by guiding our consciences to keep the Lord's commandments and by teaching us to pray.

There is one other parallel between the baptism of Jesus and our baptism. Jesus began His public mission after His baptism. Like Christ, we have also been given a mission by our baptism. That mission is to bring the message of God the Father's love to those around us and to work to bring our world under His kingship. The focus of that mission for most of you will be in your own homes. Unfortunately, there are far too many people who grow up in homes where the love of God is just a pious phrase. Parents must take very seriously the mission that have received to teach their children by both word and example that God is a loving Father who cares for all of us. Because of what Jesus has done, the Father is already pleased with us. We do not need to earn His love. Rather, because He already loves us and wants what is best for us, God the Father calls us to live out the promises of our baptism and to model our lives on Jesus, His Son. This is the gospel, the good news proclaimed by Jesus Christ.

With my prayers,

Fr. Conley