

## Homily for the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord - Year C St Peter's 5:00/7:00 Saturday Masses- Jan 12, 2019

Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11 "Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all people shall see it ...."  
Psalm 104 "When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth."  
Titus 2:11-14;3: 4-7 "He saved us ... through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit."  
Luke 3: 15-16,21-22 "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire ... You are my Son, the Beloved. With you I am well pleased."

### Introduction

Charles Atlas was the master of the 'before and after' image to sell his muscle building system. The cartoon image that Atlas presented was the 97 lb weakling young man, who got sand kicked in his face at the beach by the muscle bound guy. The girl would laugh at the guy, saying don't let it worry you little boy. Literally, two frames later, he is back at the beach, smacking the bully and hearing the girl say, O Mac, you are a real man after all.

At twelve, I did my best with the chest expander springs to turn before into after, but either I didn't do it long enough or, as time has proven, I just don't have the makeup to build muscles that would impress anyone at the beach. And, besides, that's not a married man's top priority. I'm not so sure that should even be a single guy's priority.

We use the same kind of image in Christianity. I love listening to stories of people who have experienced life before Christ and their lives after conversion to Christ. They talk in powerful terms about how their lives used to be filled with emptiness and superficial activities, but developed a great sense of meaning and purpose when their life choices were based in godly wisdom.

It can very easily seem like a magic pill. Just take this 'Jesus medicine' and your life will go from miserable to amazing. There is no doubt that having Christ in your life will make a difference. But, it's not like winning the lottery, where all you do is contribute a few bucks and buy a ticket and hope for the best. In the Christian life you have to buy in with your whole self. Christ will only work with the parts of your life that you give to him.

### Before

Before the sacrament of baptism, there was still God's promise being fulfilled in his people. **The psalmist** describes a godly existence. "Living things look to you to give them good things in due season." God sustains all things. God's Spirit is active and alive: "When you send forth your spirit they are created and you renew the face of the earth."

**Isaiah** emphasizes God's presence but also looks forward to a time of greater fulfillment. "Comfort o Comfort my people. Say to the cities of Judah, here is your God. He will feed his flock like a shepherd, carrying them in his arms. Leading them home." Beautiful images of God's loving presence with his people.

**In John's time**, we hear that anticipation of a messiah is at a fever pitch. It's in the air. It's in people's hearts. They can feel it in a way that has never been known before or since. That is why Paul later calls it "the fullness of time", when Jesus enters in to time. It was the time for something to happen.

In the before time, the world is in a kind of darkness. But in that darkness, an angel of God makes an announcement to a virgin in Nazareth. She bears a child who is called Emmanuel "God is with us." Shepherds and magi receive visions about the child and go to visit him. Later, the child goes to the temple and amazes the rabbis there with the depth of his wisdom. In the before time, John could feel it too. Even in Elizabeth's womb, he knew that he was in the presence of the Lord. In the same way, he knows now that God has come to his people and is about to show himself in a most profound way.

The Jews believed in symbolic purification rites. Washing with water represented turning to God and atonement for sin. John takes this notion out to the place where the people had earlier crossed into the land of promise. And because he spoke with such authority, they wondered if he might be the messiah, so they went out there. And what did they find? A crazy looking man telling them to turn back to God. Repent. Get your life back in order. Do what is good and right.

John does something almost hard to imagine in our time, where the goal in our culture is to be acknowledged, recognized, looked up to, admired. John

could get all that. How he must have been tempted. But John's greatness comes to us down through the ages because he knew he was the very last of the 'before' picture. He knows the limits:

1. of his worthiness: not even to untie Jesus' sandal.
2. of his power: human versus divine. That God would give power to the water of baptism, not just as a symbol of repentance.
3. of his actions: I baptize you with water; He with the HS and fire.

John is at the very end of the 'before.' He doesn't know everything that is going to happen but he knows it will transform what he has been doing and he knows it is about Jesus.

### **The Event That Changes Everything**

Then John's cousin Jesus comes to be baptized. John had intimate knowledge that Jesus definitely did NOT need to be baptized. In fact, by allowing himself to be baptized, Jesus made baptism into a sacrament, that would give the water the power to do what it could only symbolize before.

Then heaven was opened and Jesus received the only baptism that would be worthy of him. The Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form. Voice from heaven. You are my beloved Son. With you I am well pleased. The spirit came to him as to an equal, bearing witness to his divinity, a voice from the place of His own heavenly origin.

### **After**

Before, God came out of the wilderness, the place of wandering, of testing, of penance. But, afterwards, God comes *into* our wilderness, the troubled places in our lives.

Because of this, Paul declared to the people of the Christian community, "Beloved. The grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all. He saved us not because of any works of righteousness but according to his mercy through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This spirit he poured out on us richly in his son Jesus Christ."

## **Exposition**

Had he not come as a baby, he could not have suffered, died, and defeated death by rising. Had he not ascended to heaven, he could not have sent the Spirit. Had the Spirit not come, we would not be gathered here today. We would not know that, in the after time, we have become "the Beloved."

Our saviour came to be baptized so that through the cleansing waters of Baptism, he might restore us to new life, heal our sinful nature and clothe us with holiness. Lord, send forth your spirit upon us.

The water doesn't change Jesus. Jesus changes the water. Jesus transforms the water of John's baptism into the water which becomes a spring of life welling up within us, as Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well.

John's words to Jesus' words

1. Repent and be baptized. Turn to God. Return to the Lord. Behave according to the law.
2. To Nicodemus: You must be born from above. You must be born of water and the Spirit if you are to enter the kingdom.
3. To the woman at the well: The water I will give will become a spring, welling up to eternal life. Sir, give me that gift. It is I.
4. Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy spirit

## **Relevance Today**

The Holy Spirit has the power to actually cleanse us, to refresh us, to transform us. Of course, God never imposes himself on us. We are free to choose whether we want to be transformed. We are free to choose to be baptized or to live out the baptism we have received. But, once we are willing, we can be changed like what fire does to purify gold or to make steel, or like exercise does to build muscle.

Baptism requires water, the three fold invocation of God- father son and spirit- AND the commitment on the part of the baptized or their parents, to

turn to God, receive the gift of grace to live a life of holiness and, finally and most important, to hear God say "you are my beloved son. You are my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased."

But God isn't pleased with us because of how wonderful we are. God is pleased with us because when he looks at us, he sees his own Beloved son, to whom we are united in Baptism. He sees our unity with Christ.

### **Call to Action**

We have a picture of before and after Baptism that demonstrates a powerful transformation, not of the muscular body but of the strength of the Spirit. Baptism is the door into the life of grace wherein we are transformed into creatures of light and power and grace.

Let us celebrate this feast in holiness. Let us continue to be cleansed. Nothing gives such pleasure to God as the salvation of human beings. He wants you to become a living force for all humankind, lights shining in the world. Stand with the great light of heaven. Enjoy more and more the dazzling light of the trinity as you receive as individual rays.

Listen for echoes of your own baptism: the trinity, water, spirit, faith filled community gathered. This is the final event of the Christmas season. Looking beyond the baby in Bethlehem, each feast reveals the Truth of Jesus a little more each time. By our baptism, we lay claim to that divine declaration: you are my son, the beloved. In you I am well pleased. You are my daughter, the beloved. In you, I am well pleased.