

Homily for January 11, 2019

For these past two weeks we have been reading through this beautiful and grace-filled letter, First John. At the heart of John's teaching is the profound claim that we are children of God.

Here St. John tells us that this relationship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ is based on our believing in the Apostolic Witness. When we believe the wonderful truth of Holy Scripture we come into a relationship with God that St. John describes as a twofold fellowship. We have fellowship with one another as brothers and sisters of Christ. We have fellowship with the Blessed Trinity. Christianity, says St. John, really is a family affair.

In today's reading from chapter 5, St. John further develops this theme of witness. However, now the witness is not that of the Apostles, but directly that of the Holy Spirit.

This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. 7 And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth.

Here John is referring to two dimensions of our Lord's life; his baptism and crucifixion. The Spirit witnessed to the Lord's baptism when He descended on Jesus in the form of a Dove and the Father declared:

"This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased."

Then at the Transfiguration, where Luke tells us Jesus was talking with Moses and Elijah about his Exodus, meaning his crucifixion and death, again the Spirit witnesses to Jesus with a variation on the words spoken at his baptism.

"This is my son, listen to him."

John wants us to understand that the witness of the Holy Spirit at the two key moments of Jesus public ministry, its beginning – at the baptism - and its culmination, his crucifixion, pronounce that Jesus is the Son of God.

John then emphasizes this point by writing:

There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree.

Not only does the water and blood witness to Jesus baptism and crucifixion but as we know from John 19, the Apostle witnessed the following at the foot of the Cross:

But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth—that you also may believe.

Remember that in Genesis 2, Adam fell into a deep sleep and from his rib Eve was formed? Here John is showing us that as Jesus slept the sleep of death from his side, the Bride of Christ, the

Church was formed. The water of Baptism and the sacrament of the Eucharist establish us in the Faith and allow us to then grow to maturity in Christ.

Here is the point of all I have said this morning. When a person is a witness, those who were not present have a choice to make. Either they will believe the witnesses' testimony or reject it.

John is clear in his Letters and Gospel that when we come to accept this witness and believe in Jesus and come into his Church through baptism and are sustained by the Eucharist we are in the Family.

May we be renewed in our faith as we receive this teaching of St. John, knowing that our active acceptance of the testimony and witness of the Apostles' and the Holy Spirit is the trait that marks out those who are children of the Father and All in the Family.