

Homily for January 6:

St John begins his first epistle by describing that he was an eyewitness to Jesus. This is what he writes:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—2 the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—3 that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship† with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 4

All this week we have been understanding more fully this beautiful and grace-filled letter. 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.

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.

So John concludes:

He who believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. He who does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne to his Son. 11 And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life.

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.

Thanks be to Jesus for the gift of faith. May we grow in this virtue each and every day and so share in the joy of which John spoke in chapter 1 when he said:

And we are writing this that our joy may be complete.