



CONNECTING JOHN THE BAPTIST, OUR BAPTISM, AND EVERYDAY LIFE

One day a young child was playing at the shallow end of the swimming pool and decided to walk toward the deeper end, mostly out of curiosity. Before he knew it, he was in water over his head and sinking to the bottom. "I felt someone pushing on top of my head," he recalls. "I tried to get up, I tried everything but I could not get above the water." Then everything went black, he later recalled. Luckily for him, a nearby swimmer plucked him out of the water. When he came to, the man was asking him if he was alright. All that he wanted at that moment was his mother, whom he quickly found and ran to. To this day, the young boy, now a grown man, wonders if he was saved by an angel.

Today's Gospel is about going under the water and being brought up again. In the waters of baptism, even if it is a small amount of water, we are taken below the water in our unsaved state and brought forth reborn into Christ, saved and united with God. John the Baptizer was not unique in using water in a religious practice, but he was an early model for what became Christian baptism. In his immersion, which Jesus himself experienced, we see a foreshadowing of what our own baptism is about.

Our baptism should really change our lives. Baptism, the most basic of the three Sacraments of Initiation (the other two are Confirmation and Eucharist) and brings us into the community of believers. We are no longer simply "people of the world." We have "put on Christ," as we hear in the baptismal liturgy. That not only means that we are different within, as children of God, but it means we should behave differently than we might have without baptism. Baptism doesn't make us morally better than anyone else-but it does set a higher standard for our lives. Although it doesn't make us superior to anyone, the sacrament opens us up to the grace of God, not only at baptism, but also for all of our lives as Christians

We are called, like John the Baptist, to be prophetic. John was not merely putting people in the water out in the desert. He called for repentance. He lived a penitential life, as the Gospel tells us, eating "locusts and wild honey." And he preached a message of repentance, of getting ready for what was to come. The prophetic message of the Gospel is one of the most demanding challenges for American Christians. How can we be prophetic today? John preached getting to the basics: to listen to God's word and act accordingly. His cousin Jesus also was prophetic-both men were killed for their commitment. Do we stand up for what is right? Do we challenge what is wrong? Only a few of us will be radical, like John, but all of us are called to support justice. That's an Advent message for all of us.

Our Advent preparations give us a time to stop and reconsider our baptism. At this time of year, we consider the incarnation of Jesus. In the waters of baptism we are drawn into his life, his death, his resurrection. Sure we celebrate a baby at Christmas, but what we really celebrate is the birth of one who will save us. We are challenged by the life and message of John the Baptist, and of course by everything that Jesus was about, to look outside of ourselves, in ever-widening circles. Our faith is not about us alone, our families alone, our neighborhood or country alone. It's about the whole world, which Jesus came to save. Make this Christmas different.

This Advent, let us resolve to truly prepare for the coming of Christ by repenting of all that is wrong and living with an openness to God's grace. We can draw on the grace of our baptism to do so.

John the Baptist preaches that we are to repent and conform ourselves to God's will. Let us turn to the table of the Lord and receive God's grace, in the Eucharist, that makes it all possible for us.

Second Sunday



of Advent