Good Morning,

This morning I’d like to reflect with you on the theme of the Baptism of the Lord. After 29 years in ministry and hundreds of baptisms, I have spent some time reflecting on the significance of baptism. In brief I believe that baptism is a welcoming of a person into the Christian community. I also believe that baptism is a washing away of the old and embracing the new. Furthermore, I am convinced that baptism is a profoundly intimate moment between Jesus Christ and the individual. As a community we invite the Holy Spirit to come into the life of the person being baptized and begin the sanctification process whereby God’s holiness fills us more and more on a daily basis for our entire lives. In the context of the broader community it is an opportunity for those gathered on a Sunday morning to make a commitment to a family to offer them love, support and prayer. Although I could continue for pages with my reflections about baptism, let me simply summarize by stating that I believe baptism to be a life changing event with eternal consequences. For infants there is no better way to begin their relationship with Jesus Christ than baptism. For adults, baptism is about the moment that they decide that they want a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It often comes at a moment of decision. These are frequently life changing moments in the midst of an adult’s journey.

The Baptism of the Lord which we celebrate this Sunday symbolized the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. This was an experience soaked in preparation, prayer, perseverance, persistence and extraordinary possibilities.

Robert Brearley speaks of an even deeper significance of the baptismal event. He says, “Jesus presented himself for baptism as an act of solidarity with a nation and a world of sinners. Jesus simply got in line with everyone who had been broken by the wear and tear of this selfish world and had all but given up on themselves and their God. When the line of downtrodden and sin-sick people formed in hopes of new beginnings through a return to God, Jesus joined them. At this baptism, he identified with the damaged and broken people who needed God.”

This leads to an important question and that is whether or not our churches welcome new baptismal families and are willing to walk along with them on their spiritual journey. Did you know that many people temporarily leave their church when they are in crisis and go and get “help” before they return to the community? I think this is sad. Isn’t the church the hospital for the hurting? Is it not part of our Christian responsibility to embrace every new family with love and support?

My second thought today has a great deal to do with leadership. This gospel passage speaks of the passing of the baton of leadership between John and Jesus. There is an extraordinary hope that someone will lead the people out of their political, economic, social and spiritual crisis. It is decided that Jesus Christ is the one. So this leads to my question for today which comes from the writings of Earnest Hess who asks, “What expectations are people filled with today? What are they looking for in a leader? How can they discern whom they can trust and support?” In today’s gospel we experience somebody who prays His way through His calling. Jesus depends on the Holy Spirit to inform and guide Him. At every critical moment in His ministry He is immersed in prayer. He realizes He can do nothing without God. Earnest Hess states it in this way, “What is begun in baptism is lived out through the practice of prayer by which one receives the Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus was empowered for and guided in His ministry through prayer, so too are His followers, down to this day.”

Praying for you today. Looking forward to the celebration of the Baptism of the Lord this weekend. Hope you can join us for worship at 8:15 or 10:00. If not, we are livestreaming the service at <https://livestream.com/accounts/4258512>.

Blessings

Fr Stephen