

Homily

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord – Mark 1: 7-11

09th / 10th January 2021 Sooeey/ Riverstown

The River is a short story by the American author **Flannery O'Connor**. In it, we come across a little boy named 'Bevil'. And Bevil is taken care of, by an elderly baby sitter Mrs. Connin, who believes in faith healing and who really loves to hear the old time preaching. One day, Connin takes Bevil down to the river and she introduces him to the preacher. The preacher then dunks the little boy into the river and pulls him up again and says to him: "Now, you count".

In today's Gospel Reading on this solemnity of the Baptism of the Lord, we hear the voice of God the Father telling Jesus: "You are my beloved Son and my favour rests on you". Well! That is who Jesus is and He always knows who He is. He is the beloved Son of God. And so, later in the Gospels, when the Pharisees say to Jesus: "You are a sinner", he is able to say: "No, I am not, I am a beloved child of God". And when the Sadducees called Jesus a threat, he was able to say to them: "No, I am not, I am a beloved child of God". And when the demons said to Jesus: "You are powerless, powerless in the face of illness", Jesus said: "No I am not. I am the beloved Son of God". And he healed the

sick. And when the pessimists said to Jesus: “You are incapable, incapable of feeding the multitude of hungry people in front of you”, Jesus said: “No, I am not. Give me your loaves and fishes”. And watch what the beloved child of God does. He fed them. And when his accusers said to him: “You are unworthy, you are unworthy to forgive sins”, Jesus said: “No, I am not. I am a beloved Son of God”, and he forgave everything. And when death came creeping up Calvary’s hill, and grabbed a hold of Jesus and said: “Now you are mine”, Jesus said, No I am not. I am not yours death, I am a beloved child of God”. And he rose from the dead.

Well, dear friends, on this feast of the Baptism of the Lord, we too are reminded: You are God’s beloved daughter, you are God’s beloved son and you are loved beyond imagining”. He says: “Now, you really count”. Yes! God tells us that we do count, that we are precious in his sight.

And we need to remember that Jesus enters the Jordan in complete solidarity with the sinful humanity. At that point, He takes on all the human weaknesses of the broken people. And the voice that is heard when He emerges out of the waters of baptism: ‘You are my beloved Son’, is a statement of affirmation for the human condition. It is an exaltation of the goodness

which is present even in a sinful people. And by that, he was telling us so personally: “I am in here, with you and for you”. Yes!, Now, the Word has truly become flesh.

In recent times, we have all been captivated by Pope Francis. And Pope Francis is preaching a Gospel of Christian humanism, which is to say he is not sitting in a high place and handing down edict. He belongs to the people. And his power lies in the fact that he enters the waters of a broken people and he rises up with us and we hear the voice of God saying to us again today through the successor of Peter: ‘You are my beloved people’.

Well! He shares our tears, our fears and our hopes. He belongs to us. And in that manner, somehow, he makes God present to us.

It is said that when a young woman would come to join her community in order to serve the poor, Mother Teresa used to simply send her home. But if she ever came in order to become poor, and then serve the poor, then Mother Teresa would take her: a powerful message to say that one cannot serve from the top-down. You have to be part of humanity in order to experience Jesus Christ, the enfleshing of God among us.

Remember! The call of the word of God is to enter into the waters of life, into the struggles of life, to belong to one another, not in judgment, but in attachment. Pope Francis is able to move the world and touch the hearts of people, not because of his judgment, but because of his belonging. He feels he understands us. He feels he belongs to us. And he somehow comes down from the heights of the Papal Supremacy unto us and somehow becomes part of the common person.

And today, we are called into that same discipleship. That is the teaching of the baptism of the Lord: that Jesus Christ the living God enters into our humanity, belongs to us, walks with us, prays with us and suffers with us. And we belong to one another and somehow it is in our belonging to one another that we experience the enfleshing of God, the presence of Jesus Christ. For, in the end, it is not wisdom that conquers, but love that conquers. It is love that gives meaning to our life.

Let me conclude my homily with a little anecdote: A young man who had heard the Gospel accepted Baptism. Like every new earnest Christian he frequented the Church and attended seminars and study sessions in the parish. Several months later a Catechist asked him: “What have you done for Christ since you believed?” He replied: “Oh, I am a learner”.

“Well,” said the questioner, “When you light a candle, do you light it to make the candle more comfortable, or to have it give light?”. He replied, “To give light”. “Do you expect it to give light after it is half burned, or when you first light it?”. “As soon as I light it”, he said. “Very well,” was the response, “go and do likewise; begin at once”.

Well! Dear brother and sisters, we are all children of God. If so, let us love one another from this very moment, remembering who we are. And, if sickness and suffering are telling you that you are hopeless, if struggles and sins are telling you that you are futureless, if your deep dark secrets are telling you that your faith will never be strong, and if the thought of your own mortality is stealing your joy, well just remember who you are. “You are not hopeless, you are not futureless, you are not faithless and you are not joyless. You are a beloved child of God, baptized in water and sealed with the Holy Spirit, sharing the dying of Christ so that you can share his rising. That is who you are. Let us believe it, remember it, live it and never forget it. God bless you all, **Amen.**

Fr. Yashin

