

Homily for January 10, 2010

Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, C cycle, St. Joseph's, Greenfield Ctr./St. Paul's, Rock City Falls

1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Isaiah 40: 1-5, 9-11 [Like a shepherd God feeds his flock]

Responsorial Psalm 104 [Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth]

2<sup>nd</sup> Reading Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7 [Christ saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit]

Gospel Luke 3:15-16, 21-22 [Jesus will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire]

♪ *Spirit of the living God fall afresh on us. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us. Melt us, mold us, fill us, use us. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.* ♪

John the Baptist says that Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit, but only in Luke does he say that he will baptize with the Holy Spirit and **fire!**

And only Luke's Gospel says that Jesus is *praying* when the Spirit descends on him.

These readings and the song I just sang tell me that **Prayer is dangerous.**

Prayer is dangerous because it's *fattening* - it makes us very hungry for God.

It opens us to the *fire* of the Holy Spirit.

It gives us a *vision* of who we really are -

a vision which both comforts us and challenges us.

This is true of both personal prayer when I am alone and of *good* communal, liturgical prayer like the Eucharist and the other sacraments.

In the letter to Titus, we hear about how the Holy Spirit exposes our need for forgiveness, and burns up our sins in the fire of God's love.

There are obvious references to Baptism - the way the people of his time and ours celebrate the gift of life and new birth as children of God. As Paul writes, "God saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he richly poured out on us through Jesus Christ our savior."

When the first Christians celebrated Baptism, they expected the world to end within a few years, if not months. When it didn't end, and some people went back to their old ways, there was a problem. How can a person come back to living the way of love once they have gotten off the path to life?

That is when it became clear that the Holy Spirit did not just come *once*, through Baptism & Confirmation (which were in those times two parts of one sacrament), the spirit of the living God was active *throughout* the life of every disciple of Christ.

Today we celebrate that spirit at every Mass, and in a most intense way, through the sacrament of Reconciliation - which some of your young parishioners celebrated for the first time on Saturday evening.

In the early centuries of the Church, it was even called a *second* baptism, and was seen as a renewal of the sacrament of Baptism. The prayer which is part of the prayer of absolution in the renewed rite for the sacrament of Penance makes the work of the Spirit very clear,

"God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son,  
Has reconciled the world to himself and  
sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins..."

*It is the Spirit of God that gives us the power to live the gift of the Sacrament of Baptism throughout our lives.*

Today we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus, and we are given a mirror to look at the meaning of our own baptism.

What does it mean to be a baptized follower of Christ today? Our own baptism is a living sign that the same words Jesus heard in the Gospel are spoken to you and me. "*You are my beloved daughter, you are my beloved son.*" These words are both comforting and challenging. If we are children of God, we have to act like it.

*This past year, my family and I were challenged to act like God's children as we cared for my mother. We prayed for her and with her, and the Lord heard our prayers, but the answers were not always easy to hear or to live our.*

*The Spirit of God molded, filled and used my sisters and me, and gave us one mind to do whatever was best for my mom, right up to the day of her death. And that same spirit opened doors for my mom to receive the best care, and gave us energy to fight for that care.*

*The Spirit brought us closer as a family than we have ever been - even energizing the grandchildren to travel from Boston, San Francisco and Chicago to be with us.*

We are called by our baptism to live the words Clare spoke - "*Gaze upon the Lord, Gaze upon his face.*" We are called to live in imitation of Francis, who said, "Preach the Gospel at all times, if necessary use words."

We are called to preach by the way we serve, by the way we use the gifts we have been given. We are called to use those gifts for the good of others, for the good of our own families and community, for the good of the poor, the hungry and the victims of war, terror and oppression.

This does not mean that I deny my own need, or refuse to accept the love of Jesus which comes through my sisters and brothers.

It means that I will find real meaning for my life through prayer and service, rather than by centering on myself and using others to get what I want.

We are called by today's feast to renew our sense of who Jesus is, the beloved Son of God who is called to be our peace, and of who *we are*, beloved sons and daughters of the same Father, called to see who we are when we look at Christ, and to be what we see, a people who have been baptized in the Holy Spirit and fire.

Yes, Prayer is dangerous, whether it is a personal experience of God in the solitude of my heart, or a joyful celebration of God's love and truth and mercy in the sacraments of Eucharist or Reconciliation!

Real prayer makes us so hungry for God that we are ready and able to pass through the cross - even the cross of being different from much of our culture.

Real prayer opens us to the fire of the Holy Spirit which burns away our sins and energizes us to change the world.

Real prayer gives us a clear vision of who we are, children of one God, and challenges us to be who we are even when our vision is opposed.

So be careful when you pray alone or together, because God is ready to respond whenever we say or sing:

♪ *Spirit of the living God fall afresh on us. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us. Melt us, mold us, fill us, use us. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us.* ♪