THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS AN UNFILTERED LIFE

As many of you know, I recently led a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Jordan which was an unforgettable experience. One of our destinations was of course the River Jordan, the site of the Baptism of the Lord. We visited the traditional site of this event on the side of that river which is in the country of Jordan. Our guide told us that Jesus was most likely baptized on this side because St. John’s Gospel says the Baptist was baptizing “beyond the Jordan” (John 1:28) – that is, on the east bank where we were.

It was an incredibly beautiful day and we were the only pilgrims on the east side of the river. We could see several groups across the water on the Israeli side. Some were receiving Baptism there. For our part, we first renewed our Baptismal promises, which we will also be doing in a short time at this Easter Mass. Then we just enjoyed the moment. Almost everyone either waded into the Jordan or touched the water. There is no need to bless that water since Christ made it holy forever when he stepped into it; and indeed, in a mystical and real way, he recreated all waters and the whole world as he entered the river.

One of the unexpected aspects of our visit that day was the presence of a small elevated pool of filtered water from the river. This allowed folks to avoid touching the perpetually muddy Jordan directly. There is nothing wrong with this because some people are more comfortable not touching the dirty stream or they may have sensitivity to the mud. At the same time, I began to reflect on the reality that Jesus chose to come into our unfiltered world and to share our life which can be at times messy to say the least.

We know, as our patron St. Paul says in his Letter to the Philippians, that the Son of God emptied himself of his divinity (Philippians 2: 7) when he became human in the womb of Blessed Mary. He was then born into this world in a stable that
was anything but clean. He lived a humble life as a carpenter’s son. When it came time for him to begin his ministry, he came to his cousin John to receive the Baptism of repentance that John was preaching. From then on, Jesus lived our unfiltered existence.

The clear focus of Easter is Baptism. Of course, every Mass fixes our attention on the Sacrament of the Eucharist [which our Elect and Candidates will receive for the first time this evening]. Still, Baptism is front and center on Easter. It is through this door into the church that we die to sin and rise again to new life – in imitation of Jesus who went down into the tomb and then was raised up by the Father. In between his Baptism and his horrific death and glorious resurrection, he embraced humanity with great intensity and without holding anything back. His was truly an unfiltered life. He got into bed with us in a marriage between heaven and earth that began at his conception. He experienced our mess without being touched by sin. Out of the total selflessness which is the essence of the God of all love and mercy, Jesus became our brother and our friend.

We live in a time when we can choose to live a filtered life. We have so many ways at our disposal to insulate us from the pain and suffering that exists all around us in our community and our world. And we can even fool ourselves into thinking that we can keep our own pain at bay – including the pain caused by our sinfulness. And this filtration system can very efficiently keep us from Christ and from Christ in our neighbor. But our Christian vocation insistently calls us to follow Jesus’ example of unfiltered living.

It is interesting that all the Gospel writers, including St. Matthew whose account of the Resurrection the deacon just proclaimed, agree that some women were the first to encounter the Risen Lord. Matthew says that Mary Magdalen and "the other Mary" were these witnesses. This agreement among the evangelists about the women as witnesses of the Resurrection tells us two things. First, it is as close to proof that we will ever have that some of his followers truly saw Jesus alive after he died. This is so because no one who wanted to make up a story about the
Resurrection would have had women as its first witnesses since the testimony of women was not accepted in the ancient world.

Second, making women so important in the critical accounts of Jesus' Resurrection appearances show how much God loves the lowly. Throughout his life on this planet, the Son of God reached out to the humble and the forgotten, the no accounts of his world. And Jesus' friendship with women is a big part of his outreach. He did not filter them or anyone in need out of his life and ministry.

May we follow the Lord's example! An unfiltered life is one where we have the courage to go to where the poor live and care for them in some way. An unfiltered life touches the sick and the lonely and the addicted and even the sinner --- and it is equally respectful of women and men. An unfiltered life in America right now is open to sharing our country with some refugees and immigrants, including most of the undocumented. The Risen Christ asked the women to tell the disciples to go to Galilee and he would see them there. Now Galilee was a very diverse part of ancient Palestine where Jesus spent most of his public ministry. By contrast, Judea (where Jerusalem was located) was a very Jewish area and was thus safer for Jews who wanted to try to lead a filtered life. Jesus risked rubbing shoulders with the unsavory and the despised and the untouchables. Through our Baptism and our Confirmation and through the Bread of Life, we become members of the Body of Christ. And if we are truly part of Christ, we will try to put away the filters and live generously for others -- by the grace of the same Risen Christ!