Baptism of the Lord – Year A 2014

“When You but Call My Name!”

Isaiah 42:1-4, 6-7
Psalm 29:1-2, 3-4, 9-10
Acts 10:34-38
Matthew 3:13-17

“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” God the Father reveals this to us in His own voice today as we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, the feast that brings the Christmas season to a close. During Advent and Christmas, Angels, shepherds, Kings, scribes and Magi told us who this amazing Child, born of a virgin in a humble dwelling, was. He is the “Newborn King of the Jews”; he is Emmanuel, “God with us”; he is Jesus, a name that means “God Saves”; he is the Christ, “the Anointed One”. All of these names and titles give us a great deal of insight as to who this child is and His true significance: none more so than His identity as the beloved Son of the Father which was revealed at His baptism.

Likewise, at our baptism each one of us is claimed by God as His beloved sons and daughters and the names we are given by our earthy parents at our baptism are a sign of their hope for what we too might become. I am one of six children and each of us has some form of the name Mary or Joseph in our full name as a sign of
devotion to Jesus’ parents as models of holy people. None of us have done the names justice of course but they are constant reminders that we are tied to the Body of Christ in His Church through our baptism when we were given these names.

Then, at Confirmation we are given yet another name! This time though it is one that WE chose or choose. This time it is up to us to look to the communion of saint in order to find a name that represents the ideals, virtues and life that we want to model as we begin to live our lives as fully initiated members of the Body of Christ. I bring this up because in addition to celebrating the Baptism of the Lord we are bringing the eighth grade Confirmation retreat to a close at this Mass. {Ask the eighth graders stand and be acknowledged} I can’t think of a more fitting day or way to have such an event!

And I think it is profound because Baptism, Eucharist that we are here to share and Confirmation are all intrinsically linked. Together they are the full expression of initiation into the Body of Christ and the Church as the People of God. But more importantly, they each call us to do SOMETHING as much as they call us to be SOMEBODY. We are changed in a real way by way of these and all of the sacraments; they are not merely rites of passage. We receive Grace in the sacraments and are charged with a mission to go and do in the way that Jesus did. We are called to follow him and to carry our crosses as well.
This is why the feast of the Baptism of the Lord marks the end of the Christmas season; not because it has been almost three weeks long but because now it is time to share what we learned about Jesus during this time with the world. The Baptism of Jesus that we hear in the gospel today takes place as Jesus is about to embark on his public ministry {; to do what he became Incarnate to do OR} in order to give meaning to His Incarnation by setting out to do what he came here to do. So it is significant that Baptism is the first thing that takes place just as it is the beginning of our journey of faith. What is more significant though is that by allowing himself to be baptized by John he made the waters of baptism Holy. The Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit came to dwell in the waters of Baptism and from that point on and gave the act its true meaning. The water, like us, is changed forever.

Likewise, after Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection in which we participate in the Eucharist, the Holy Spirit came to Jesus’ disciples in the upper room at Pentecost. They were filled with the Holy Spirit because they were still committed to Jesus’ mission despite him not being visibly present. This is the model for the sacrament of Confirmation and with the Holy Spirit dwelling within them they were strengthened and given courage and wisdom and compelled to go out and continue the work Jesus gave them to do.
Each of us here today, the baptized, the confirmed, the soon to be confirmed, are given the gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to continue Jesus’ mission which is to carry out the will of the Father. We commit to this through the willful reception of the sacraments and in return are given what we need to fulfill our mission. In all of this Jesus is our model and guide. When we show kindness to strangers, share with those who are in need, visit those who are alone or lonely, love one another or simply put the needs of others before our own then we are living out our baptismal promise and mission; we are witnessing to Christ in our lives and in our world and we are using the gifts of the Holy Spirit that we were each given in these sacraments. When we do these things we are living as true Disciples of Christ in the manner of the saints whom we look to for support and guidance through their guidance. When we do these things we become the servants of Christ that Isaiah refers to in our First Reading; “Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations.” In other words, when we do these things we too can hope to hear the voice of the Father call us by name and say “You are my beloved son or daughter, with whom I am well pleased.”