We come together today to celebrate the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time. This Sunday could be called “Everybody’s Mission Sunday”. It could easily be called this because we all have a mission in our lives because of our baptismal promises. That mission is to announce the Good News of the Gospel to all we meet, with our words and our actions. Maybe not the exact way that John the Baptist did; but fulfill our mission we must do.

We began the Church’s new year back at the beginning of Advent, the time to prepare for Christ to come into our lives, not just at Christmas but when we leave this mortal world. We then went through the Christmas season, celebrating the birth of Christ, the Feast of the Holy Family, the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God, the Epiphany and then we jumped to the Baptism of the Lord that took place when Jesus was a mature young man ready to start his public ministry.

The baptism of the Lord is placed with the celebration of Christmas because baptism is a celebration of our, all of us who have been baptized, acceptance of our mission to “go forth and spread the Good News of the Gospel”. The Catechism says; “The baptism of Jesus is on his part the acceptance and inauguration of his mission of God’s suffering Servant”.

At the baptism of Jesus we read these words, “After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened for him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

Our Gospel today opens just after Jesus had finished his forty day fast in the Desert. He was probably walking toward the Jordan River where John would still be baptizing. When John sees him he boldly says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” John then goes on to tell just how he knows who Jesus is and says, “Now I have seen and testify that he is the Son of God.”

As we begin this Ordinary Time of the Church we see Jesus slowly and deliberately fulfill the Old Testament. But most important is to hear Jesus bring the sacraments of our church into action in the faith, beginning with the sacrament of Baptism. The fulfillment of our baptism is the reception of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Upon believing that the Spirit did come upon Jesus, the implication is to discover in the Gospels how Jesus responded to the Spirit in the circumstances of his life. And through prayer we are to seek the Spirit to guide us in our life.

Many of us Catholics find ourselves in a very busy world and don’t feel the presence of the Holy Spirit working within us. Many Catholics say that they just don’t have time to think of prayer or the working of the Spirit in their lives because there are so many things that have to get done with working, shopping, cooking, caring for the children, etc. And most importantly many Catholics say they just don’t see or feel the Spirit at work in them or around them.
Unfortunately these kinds of excuses lead to other lackadaisical practices in our Catholic faith. Think about it! How many times do we enter this church and fail to greet Jesus, present in the Tabernacle, by genuflecting before entering our pew? How many times have we come to receive Jesus at Communion without the proper reverence, bowing before we receive and presenting our hand with admiration? How many times have we left church early, without a proper reason?

This is a true story. About a month and a half ago I was asked to go to St. Ann’s Hospital to baptize a baby that was born 1 ½ months premature. The child was having difficulty with breathing and taking nourishment. I arrived that same afternoon and talked with the mother and grandmother as we were lead to the incubator where the child was being cared for. I proceeded to baptize the child while the family and two nurses looked on.

I saw the grandmother here in church the next Sunday and she told me that immediately after I left the child began to show improvements and was on her way to her new life. All of those at the hospital were sure that the child’s improvement was due to the Baptism.

Through our baptism we are all given the ability to understand the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The family of this child were not overly devout but simply believed that the gift of baptism would help the child.

The Sacrament of Baptism is a gift from God the Father to each one of us. We did not have to do anything to receive this gift; it is given to us from our Heavenly Father freely with no strings attached. Through this abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives we are guided by profound implications for defining the meaning of our human existence.

As we begin this Ordinary Time in our church calendar let us remember that we are all called through our baptism to be proclaimers of the Gospel by what we say and do. If we are open to the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in our lives we become signs of God’s loving presence in the world. St. Francis of Assisi said this in a way easy to remember: “You may be the only gospel a person will ever read.”

As we continue with this celebration let us prepare our minds for these “bold” words of St. John the Baptist when Fr. Dave lifts up the Eucharist and declares, “Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.”