

Homily Notes

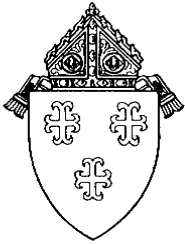
FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

Cycle C

Fr. David, a newly ordained priest, visits the 2nd grade students of the parish school on a cold January day. Filled with excitement and zeal for his new ministry, Fr. David is inspired to share with the students about his life and his vocation. He says, “Good morning boys and girls, I am Fr. David, and I am here to speak to you about something special. I am going to speak to you of my vocation.” The students sit up straight as they begin to listen attentively. He continues, “A long time ago, when I was a bit older than you are, I thought God was asking me to do some special things with my life – to help people, to love God and Jesus, and to bring hope to people who were having a difficult time. You see, when I was baptized, God gave me the gift of my vocation. This vocation is a special gift. It is to be shared.” As the school children looked wide-eyed. Fr. David asked them, “So what do you think God wants you to do with your vocation?” Johnny starts waving his hand high, eager to share his insight. Johnny stood up and proudly proclaimed, “For my vocation, me and my family are off to Disney World!”

We might expect that the concept of vocation may be difficult for a young person to understand. However, we may be surprised how many adults can easily misunderstand the concept of vocation, especially as it pertains to their life. As we see the declining numbers of priests, sisters and brothers working in ministry, we can be gripped by the fear that we are in a vocation shortage. Do we have a vocation shortage today? The simple answer is “No!” We in fact do not have a vocation shortage! Why? When we reflect on the nature of vocation perhaps it would be good for us to sit with Fr. David and the 2nd grade class to understand that we ALL in fact have been called, through our baptism to live a life in Christ, filled with Gospel values, to share with one another the Good News of Jesus in our daily life. We might live this vocation as a religious, a priest or deacon. Perhaps we might live it as a mom or a dad, a husband, or a wife. We might live this vocation as a single person. How we understand our call to live these Gospel values in our life is our discernment of our vocation. So do we have a vocation shortage? No! We are all called to see and understand that gift of our vocation.

A few years ago, author Russell Shaw wrote an article in America, a Catholic periodical. The title was, “What Vocation Shortage?” He wrote about the personal vocation that we all have. And, wrote about how the majority of us don’t see that our life choices are actually vocations. He writes, “The idea of personal vocation is the antidote. Everybody has one – God calls every member of the church by name. Seen in this light, the challenge is not to find out whether you have a vocation, but to identify the vocation you unquestionably have.”



We all have a vocation. We are invited to understand how the choices that we have already made in life are an extension and call from our own baptism. What was the giftedness from God that called us to become the mature faith-filled person we are today? And we might ask, “Where do we still need to grow in our Christian life?” “What is stirring in our hearts, moving us to follow Christ with the gift of our life?”

Today we remember the baptism of Jesus. It is the moment when he was affirmed and confirmed in his own mission. From his baptism, he began his ministry. At his baptism, he understood how beloved he was by God. In the first reading Isaiah speaks about the servant whom God upheld. The servant will bring forth justice to the nations and will have God’s spirit. Peter, in the second reading, teaches the people that Jesus came to preach peace. Jesus was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit, and did wonderful things for God.

What does this all say about vocation? If we want peace and God’s love to reign here and now, then we are invited to do what Jesus did: to love, to find opportunities to love, to be compassionate. We are challenged to show mercy as God shows mercy. Will we ever live out this vocation perfectly? Probably not.

In discerning a call as a priest, my vocation has led me to understand that I have been called to serve; to be in the places where people are hurting and where people are celebrating life. It was in the rough, and challenging situations of life where I seemed to experience God most strongly in my life. So I have had a sense of what I wanted to do, but the real question however, was “How?”. That was what the heart of my discernment was all about. How was I to live my life, being faithful to the stirrings in my heart calling me to service? I could have been married, or have remained single, and still have responded to God’s invitation. But my life as a [religious and a] priest made the most sense to me.

So what is God doing in you? What difference is the message of the parables, teachings, words of Jesus doing in your life right now? What are the experiences in your life that you and God can look at together and see a deeper meaning that can in turn have an impact for your future?

God has not given up on us..... on you... or on me. At this point in our lives, in the life of our church and of our community here, God is asking us all to be open; to be open to the gifts that have been given to us in baptism; to be open to the deeper message of our life experiences; to be open to the quiet and gentle stirrings in our hearts that move us closer to understanding what God is calling us to in our life. Whenever we are invited to look at our life in light of God’s vision and call of our heart, we might want to be like Johnny and prefer that the topic moves from vocation to vacation. In the end, we are called to be open – open to the whisper of God’s gentle Spirit stirring us into action, and open to the voice of God calling us through the people we are called to serve.