

First Sunday in Epiphany
Isaiah 42:1-9, Psalm 29, Matthew 3:13-17
January 12, 2014
David H. Teschner

I plan to keep my remarks brief this morning to allow more time for members of the Episcopal Church Women to speak a little later.

On this first Sunday of the season of Epiphany, we always read about Jesus' baptism either from Matthew, Mark or Luke. The baptism of Jesus, in all cases, jump starts his public ministry. First the water, then the heavens open and the Spirit descends, followed by the voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

A unique feature of Matthew's telling of the baptism is the brief conversation between John and Jesus, before the actual baptism, in which John acknowledges that Jesus should baptize him. Jesus responds in essence by giving him permission to proceed regardless of Jesus' superiority to John. Jesus wants to be identified with the rest of the people and thus be fully part of the human community.

In a 2009 interview, before Roman Catholic Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio became Pope Francis, he told this story of another baptism.

"Just a few days ago I baptized seven children of a woman on her own, a poor widow, who works as a maid, and she had had them from two different men. I met her last year at a church festival. She'd said, 'Father, I am in mortal sin. I have seven children, and I have never had them baptized.' It had happened because she had no money to bring the godparents from a distance, or to pay for the party, because she always had to work.

I suggested we meet to talk about it. She came to see me and told me that she could never find all the godparents and get them together.... In the end,

I said, 'Let's do everything with only two godparents to represent the others.' They all came here for a little instruction, and I baptized them in the chapel of the archbishop. After the ceremony, we had a little refreshment – cola and sandwiches.

She told me, 'Father, I can't believe it, you make me feel so important.'

I replied, 'But lady, where do I come in? It's Jesus who makes you important.'"

If the voice of God from heaven made Jesus feel important at his baptism, can we imagine that that same voice or Jesus makes us feel important at our own baptism and now every time we receive the holy bread and wine of Christ's presence?

Maybe on this Sunday when we are reminded of the importance of baptism and, not the least, our own, we can reflect upon these questions first posed by a Franciscan monk to another brother:

Could it be that Jesus is proud of you?

Proud that you have accepted the faith which he offered you?

Proud that after he chose you, you chose him for a friend and Lord?

Proud that you haven't given up?

Proud that you believe in him enough to try again and again?

Proud that you can trust that he can help you?

Do you ever think that Jesus appreciates you for wanting him and for your saying "No" to so many things that would separate you from him?

Do you ever think that Jesus is grateful to you for pausing to smile and comfort one of his brothers or sisters who has a great need to see a smile or feel a touch? Do you ever think of Jesus as being grateful to you for learning more about him so that you can speak to others about him?

Do you ever think that Jesus can be angry or disappointed in you for not believing that he has forgiven you totally?

“This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.” God has many more beloved sons and daughters with whom God is pleased as well, including you and me. AMEN.