

Baptism of the Lord “Webbed Feet and Sacramental Grace”

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When we live in the wet Pacific Northwest, we are accustomed to having webbed feet. I think this is one of the reasons why whenever snow is in the forecast, Seattleites panic. Usually this time of year, it is one rainy system after the other. It so wet in Western Washington in the wintertime that I am surprised we don't have gills. Precipitation can obviously come in so many forms, and in Western Washington, we get a lot of it. On the other hand, we obviously know that we are dependent on water for survival. Our bodies are mostly comprised of water, the average human cannot live much more than three days without water, and health experts constantly remind us to drink eight glasses of water each day. Who here actually does that? Throughout history, water has symbolized so many concepts in so many ways. Water can symbolize health. Water can symbolize peril. Water can symbolize birth. Water can symbolize death. I find it interesting that the bible playfully gives us many glimpses of divine revelation by way of water.

In the opening chapter of Genesis, we have the spirit of the Lord hovering over the chaotic primordial waters, bringing creative order to the chaos. Human beings are created out of this chaos to be stewards of this creation. The order in the universe is maintained so long as humanity is in right relationship with God. When that right relationship disappears, the primordial stormy waters appear like they did in the time of Noah, or like in the story of Jonah, or like the story of Pharaoh's army crossing the Red Sea, or the story of Jesus calming the sea in the Gospel stories. The stories of Jesus walking on water remind us of the spirit of the Lord hovering over the chaotic waters of Genesis. The message is, when life gets stormy allow the Lord into the boat of our lives. Only the Lord can bring order and understanding to our stormy existence.

Today, we see Jesus being submerged into the waters of the Jordan by a human being. John knows that he is the one that ought to be baptized by Jesus, but Jesus insists upon being baptized by John. Here we have the priest being baptized by the penitent, we have the king surrendering to his subject, and we have the creator being cleansed by his creation. This has something significant to say about our relationship with the Lord. God Himself wants to enter into our stormy waters. God himself wants to be submerged completely into the waters of our existence. The baptism of the Lord is therefore a fitting way to end the Christmas season because it truly is a celebration of Incarnation. Christ is Emmanuel. Emmanuel means God is with us. Everything about the Christmas season leads us to the sacrament of baptism.

John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River. By this action, Christ opened a doorway out of the storminess of sin and death through the sacrament of baptism. Most of us have received this sacrament already. Some of us here are preparing to receive the sacrament at Easter time. Perhaps there are some here who haven't been baptized yet. The message for all of us is: Christ gave us baptism so to establish a doorway of new birth from this life to the next. Baptism is a doorway that leads us to the other sacraments, reconciliation,

holy Eucharist, confirmation, anointing of the sick, holy matrimony, and holy orders. Lived correctly, baptism can lead us to everlasting life.

Every time we enter into the Church, we remember our baptism by dipping our finger in the water and make the sign of the cross. Combining these two activities into one create an irresistibly intriguing symbol. By this action, we remember several things. First, we remember that we are creatures born of water, we remember that we are reborn in the Spirit through the waters of baptism, we remember that our creator is a triune God of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and we remember that we are saved because the incarnate God entered into the storminess of human death on the cross, to embrace us in that storminess, leading us back into the ordered eternity of God. Next time you dip your fingers in holy water and make the sign of the cross, take a moment to reflect the significance of what you are doing and what you are saying. Because, we all know, for baptism to be redemptive, it must be lived.

Baptism ought to be sealed by the commitment of confirmation. Our baptism ought to be nourished by the body and blood of our Lord. Baptism ought to be renewed by the liberation of reconciliation when we fall into sin. The grace given to us in baptism ought to be assisted by the sacrament of anointing when we are sick. Baptism ought to be at the heart of the commitment to marriage. And baptism must be at the heart of the commitment to be a priest, deacon or bishop. All vocations in the life of the Church flow from our baptism. Our baptism is what helps us support young people to follow their hearts to embrace the sacrament of marriage. Our baptism is what helps us encourage young people to consider religious life as a sister, priest, or deacon. Our baptism is what helps encourage our brothers and sisters, no matter where they are at in the walk of life, to live committed Christian lives as disciples of the Lord. Our baptism is what compels us to be good stewards of the gifts of time, talent and treasure God has given us. Our baptism is what compels us to be merciful and charitable to those in need.

And so my friends, as we make our way through life, it is good to have webbed feet as water gives us a powerful symbol. We are invited this weekend to renew our baptismal vows, to allow the Lord to enter into the storminess of whatever life throws at us, to welcome Jesus into the boat of our heart as our savior, our captain and our compass to our heavenly Father in heaven and eternal home.