

Baptism of Our Lord – 2015

One of my favorite reality TV shows is *Undercover Boss*...If you've never seen it,...in a typical episode, the CEO of some big company goes undercover to one of the company's factories or stores...He rolls up his sleeves and works anonymously alongside the other workers to see 1st hand what they have to deal with as they do their jobs ...By becoming one of them, the CEO gains an appreciation for what the ordinary workers need to do their jobs better and to be happier in their work....Can you guess who was the 1st Undercover Boss?...Jesus Christ!...Think about it...He's the King of the universe...The King of heaven...Can't be a bigger boss than that,...and He went undercover as a human being,...as one of us, an ordinary person ...for about 30 years...until His cover was blown by the event Mark briefly describes in today's Gospel.: the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River by his cousin John...the event which revealed Jesus' true identity as the beloved Son of God,...and marked the beginning of His mission to save God's people from their sins.

All four Gospels tell about this man named John who God raised up to prepare the way for the Messiah, the Christ...John was a powerful speaker, filled with the Spirit of God...He travelled along the banks of the Jordan preaching to anyone who would listen, calling people to "repent and be baptized for the Kingdom of God is upon us."...People from all around flocked to John to hear his fiery preaching, confess their sins and be baptized...That's why he got the nickname, John the Baptist....Now, there's something very strange here....People went to John to have their sins washed away in the waters of Baptism. ...But, why did Jesus - the only person on the planet without sin -...go to John to be baptized?...I mean what sins did Jesus need washed away?...Why did Jesus want John to baptize Him ?...Hmm?...Well....

...The answer is found in Matthew's account of Jesus's baptism...When Jesus went to John, ...John objected and said to Jesus, "I need to be baptized by you; why are you coming to me ?" ...Remember what Jesus said in reply?...He essentially said "It must be done this way, John, because it is the Father's will...It might seem wrong to you, but it is part of His plan and I must obey it."...By being baptized, the human Jesus was saying YES! to God's call,...YES! to God's purpose for His life,...whatever it may be, wherever it may lead....and we know where it lead, don't we?...In His baptism, Jesus embraced God's mission with a resounding YES!...and in turn, God embraced Him...When Jesus came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit came upon Him, ...and God proclaimed, "You are my beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."...It's funny, I always envision God in this scene like a proud Papa saying, "Jesus, you such a good-a boy. You make-a me so happy."...You do know God is Italian, right?

Anyway, there was a lot going on that day at the Jordan River...Baptized by John,... anointed with Holy Spirit and lovingly affirmed by God the Father, Jesus began His mission as Savior of the world as He came up out of the water....John's baptism was for liars, adulterers, thieves,... and yet Jesus had willingly plunged into the water as if to say, "I'm with them!"....He identified with the sinners He would eventually give up His life for. ...Jesus's love for us moved Him to come and be washed in the Jordan because we are sinners – we are not clean...He did what God required, He did what was right because we so often do what is wrong. ...His mission to gain our salvation began in the river that day and ended on the cross 3 years later.

Ok, we can see that Jesus's baptism was the foundation and inspiration for everything He did with the rest of His life...Your baptism and mine should be that same foundation and inspiration in our lives, leading us down the path God has for us... Like Jesus, at our baptism we were anointed by the Holy Spirit – though I don't think any of us had a dove fly down and gently rest on us – and even though we didn't hear God the Father's voice,...we can bet that He was

proudly looking down at each of us...quietly proclaiming “You are my beloved son (daughter).” as we came out of the water.

.....Just as Jesus’s baptism launched His public ministry, our baptism launched us on our mission in the world....As baptized Christians, each of us are part of God’s plan of salvation. ...It’s not because we are anything special, but because God has claimed us for His own through our baptism,...giving us the graces and the Holy Spirit power to be part of us His plan,...He calls us - as He called Jesus - to say “Yes, Father, I am yours,...use me.”...

As part of God’s plan for the world, all baptized Christian’s have the same mission...It’s the same mission Jesus gave His disciples before He ascended into heaven: “Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to all creation.”...That’s our mission folks, to bring the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ into the world...because there are people out there who’ve never had the Good News preached to them; they need to hear it...There are people who HAVE heard it, but have turned away from it; they need to hear it again...There are people who are hurting, people who have lost hope, people who think God has forgotten them; they need to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ. They need to hear the Good News that:... *Jesus loves us...Jesus suffered and died for us because He wants us to spend eternity with Him in heaven...Jesus forgives us when we fall and get up and keep trying...He is always with us as He promised ...through the workings of the HS,...and especially in His sacred Body and Blood,...always there to give us strength and courage to face and get through the trials and troubles that come into every life...*This is the Good News we the baptized are called to preach....Got that?

I bet some of you are thinking, “Hold on Deacon Ron, I can’t do that...That’s your job and Fr. Mike’s job.”...Well, I want you to listen to this story about St. Fr of Assisi

...St. Fr asked a young monk to come with him into town to preach. The novice was thrilled to have this opportunity to learn from the master...The two men set out for the city, then walked up and down the main street, then several side streets, chatting with peddlers and interacting with people along the way...After some time, as they were walking back to the abbey, ..the young monk said to Francis, “Did you forget, Master, that we went to town to preach?”...Francis replied, ...“My son, we have preached...Many people saw us...They watched our behavior and our attitudes very closely....They noticed how we treated people and one another...That’s how we preached our sermon this morning.”...St. Francis was saying that it’s not necessary to preach using words...We can be more effective in bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ to others by how we LIVE the Good News, ...by how we let the Good News guide and direct the way we live our life.

My friends, you don’t have to preach from a pulpit to carry out your baptismal mission...People are watching what we do more than they are listening to what we say...People will know we are Christians, not because we bear the name Christian,...but because we live the life...we live the Good News...we live the commandment Jesus gave us to love one another as He has loved us...This is how the people who are watching us will have the Good News preached to them.

Let me end with a story about a 10-yr old boy who was terrible at math; he was failing math. His parents had tried everything but nothing was working, so even though they had no religion, they decided to enroll their son in a Catholic school...After his 1st day in school, the boy surprised his parents by coming home and going right to his room and hitting the books...Then, after dinner, ...he went back to his room and worked on his studies right up to bed time – no TV – no X-box. This pattern continued day after day until it was time for the 1st quarter report card. ...The boy came home and handed his report card to his mother...She opened it very cautiously and to her amazement under the subject of math she saw a big red “A”! ...She was overjoyed...She

asked her son, "Was it the nuns that did it?"...The boy shook his head "No!" ... "Was it the one-on-one tutoring?" ...Again, he answered "No."... "Was it the text-books?".... "Nope." ... "Then, what was it?"...The boy thought for a moment, then he answered, ..."Well, when I walked in the door that 1st day and looked up and saw that guy they nailed to the "plus sign", I knew they meant business."...We Catholics can be very scary.

My friends, baptism means that the Christ of the cross – the man on the plus sign – has made such an impact on us that we will let our lives mean business...we will let Jesus work through us so that others will come to know Him too...Our baptism probably took less than one hour in church,...but it is a journey that will take us through the rest of our life and hopefully on to heaven... Our mission – baptism reminds us - is to take as many people along with us as we can. AMEN!