

JANUARY 15, 2023: 2ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME



This week we celebrated the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. In being baptized, Jesus established the basic necessity for all Christians to be baptized. It becomes the very foundation of the life we are called to live. God has chosen to make us part of his mission in the world. He wants us to be his agents of change and mission. Each one of us is called to be a participant in the wonderful gift of sharing our faith with the whole world. When we fail to exercise our duty and responsibility that arises from our baptism—to bring Christ's message into the world—then we have failed God. Think of it this way: if someone was drowning and you had a rope to throw to them, but kept it for yourself

because you did not want to intrude, you would be responsible for that person's death. But if you threw the rope and they refused to take it, the fault is theirs alone. We must recognize that the world, in a sense, is drowning and we have the rope to save the world—Christ. We must throw the rope; in other words, we must evangelize in order to bring the message of Christ to others. If we do not, then we are directly responsible if they are lost to Christ and come to lead a life of damnation. If they refuse to take the rope, then the responsibility is theirs alone.

We must prepare ourselves to become agents of mission, but how do we do that? The first step is to accept, and take seriously, that we have the only message of salvation. We must become comfortable with the truth that salvation is only possible through Christ. And that Christ came *not* to condemn the world but to save the world. We must understand what our message to the world is all about. It is a message of love but also of challenge. Yes, Christ accepted all the people who came to Him but He did not leave them in their sin. He challenged them to reject their sins and follow Him. We must also realize that following Christ does not happen in a moment of instant clarity and ability to follow. Instead, as with Saint Peter, it will happen with fits and starts: people will falter and that's okay. We are not a Church of Saints but, rather, a Church of people on the road of redemption in and through Christ. We are a Church of people being redeemed by the saving actions of Jesus Christ. We are not a Church of perfect people, but of those being perfected in and through Christ. We are a Church wholly, completely, and totally dependent upon Christ for all things, particularly our salvation. We are part of a club that has no exclusions but one—that all must accept Christ as their Lord and Savior and give over their will completely to the Father.

We are not a Church of rules to be followed. We are not a Church of do's and do not's. We are not a Church that is for this and against that. Yes, we have our beliefs and they are important. We must always, as a Church, support life but that is *not* our only message. We must always uphold the truth of marriage and family life but that is *not* our only message. We must always uphold the preferential option of the poor but that is *not* our only message. We must always be about supporting the marginalized and suffering but that is *not* our only message. We must always uphold the truths of proper use of our sexuality and its appropriate expression but that is *not* our only message. It is far too easy to focus on issues and let that become the focus of our faith. And when we do that, we have lost the power of our faith.

Our faith is not issue-oriented but, rather, it is driven by relationship. If people do not have a real relationship with Christ, then all of our teachings will be meaningless. They only find their strength when they are grounded in a real relationship with Christ. We cannot save people by trying to stop "bad" behavior. We only can save them by leading them to Christ. We are not going to lead people to Christ by telling them how bad they are, or all the wrong things they are doing. We are not throwing them a rope when we hammer them with the brokenness of their lives. Yes, people do need to repent and take up the challenge of transforming their lives in accord with the will of God. But first they need some hope and Christ is that hope.

When Jesus forgave the adulterous woman, He did not belabor the point of her sin; He simply accepted her and then challenged her to sin no more. We must do the same. The Good Samaritan helped the dying man but did so with no expectation of a return. We must do the same. As Christ hung on the cross He forgave those who crucified Him. We must do the same. We are not here to judge a person, but only their sinful action. We are here to accept and love the broken ones in the world because that is what Christ did for us.

In our baptism we were called to become agents of change and mission. We do that through how we use the gifts and talents God has given us. Over the next couple of weeks we will examine how we do this.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@theholyrood.org , or if easier please call or text me at (978) 254-0560.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read "Fr. Brian". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Fr. Brian