

The Gospel for January 13, 2008

Reflection from John Surette, SJ

The Baptism of Jesus

“Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him...And a voice came saying, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

I invite you to imagine the gospel scene. Close your eyes if it helps. Imagine the scene, not as something taking place up on the stage with you sitting down in the audience watching, but in your imagination be there in the actual scene yourself.

See the muddy waters of the Jordan meandering through the desert landscape, with a narrow strip of trees and plants growing between the river waters and the desert sands and rocks.

Notice the time of the day. It is early in the morning toward dawn. It is important for the people to gather



before the sun gets too high in the sky and the heat becomes too oppressive.

Notice also how large the crowd is. One wouldn't expect so many people at this remote place and at this early hour. There is something about water, however, that allures

The Well

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people. There is something archetypal, something primordial, something alluring about water that resonates within the human body-spirit.

Not all in the crowd are there for spiritual reasons. Some are merely curious about John the Baptist and wondering about what new teaching he is promoting. Others are there with a critical view to check on what is happening at the river and to make sure that it is orthodox and according to the law. Some are there because they followed Jesus there. You are one of these people who are there because you followed Jesus to the river.

See him wading out into the waters to where John is standing. See the meeting of the eyes, of the souls, of these two men. Hear their brief conversation and Jesus saying: “It is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

Observe John plunging Jesus down into the darkness of the muddy waters. Perhaps in your imagination you can hear John saying to Jesus: The waters are troubled my friend. They are troubled by the occupation of our country by the Romans. They are troubled by all the violence and the injustice that afflicts our people. They are troubled by the sadness and anxiety and worries that are in your soul and in mine.

See Jesus pushing up from under the waters. See him pushing up into the life-giving bright sunlight. Yes, the waters are troubled, but God’s almighty power is also moving. There is the promise of freedom from the Roman occupation. There is the promise of liberation from the violence and the injustice. There is the promise of deliverance from the personal sadness, anxiety, and worry. All these promises are carried by the water at this very moment.

Hear the voice saying: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.”

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But why “pleased”? Consider all those things spoken of by the prophet Isaiah that we heard about in our first reading this morning: “He shall bring forth justice to the nations...a bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he shall not quench...he will open the eyes of the blind and bring out from the dungeon those who live in darkness” Jesus has yet to do any of these things...Jesus has yet to begin his public ministry.

So why is God “pleased”? It cannot be because of what Jesus has accomplished. It cannot be because of the successes he has achieved. So why is God “pleased”?

God is pleased simply because of love...an unconditional love...a love that is poured out upon Jesus and the whole of creation, a love that is not dependent upon achievement or success...a love that is given even in falling short and in failure...a love that doesn’t stop on the outside but penetrates deep inside and beholds the beauty and the longings and the promise and holiness that is there.

And so it is, sisters and brothers, regarding God being pleased with us. And so it is with God’s love for you and for me. As we begin the New Year 2008 we are faced with the awesome reality of God’s unconditional love for us, a love that doesn’t depend upon what we have accomplished, a love that is given simply because we, along with the whole of creation, participate in the great Mystery of existence!