



**The First Sunday after the Epiphany
The Baptism of Christ
January 12, 2020
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+O God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Strength and Redeemer. Amen.

Some of you may wonder what it means for preachers these days to preach a message of hope when the world around us or as Chicken Little indicated, the sky seems to be falling. Well, it is very difficult.

Those of us who preach here at St. Marks understand that the Gospel of Christ needs to be made *relevant* in the modern world. With the way things seemingly are in our nation capital and elsewhere, I can tell you that I am deeply disturbed with destructive narratives and actions which speak more loudly than words.

This coming May, a workshop will be offered entitled, “Preaching against the Grain: When Politics and Culture Collide”. It is being sponsored by the Anglican Theological Review and the Episcopal Preaching Foundation.

The announcement stated: “Preaching in politically divided times isn't easy, but it is critically important. The martyred Archbishop of El Salvador, St. Oscar Romero, once said, "A gospel that doesn't unsettle, a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin...what gospel is that?" The workshop will present perspectives “on how to share the ‘unsettling’ gospel in these conflicted times”. (<http://www.preachingfoundation.org/conference-parish-clergy/>)

I had the privilege of being in the church where Fr. Romero was martyred as well as the university where the Jesuit priests and their housekeeper were martyred in San Salvador. Both were truly moving experiences.

Are we not unsettled, troubled, distressed and even fearful in these “conflicted times” in which we live? Have you thought about the Church’s role in the world especially during such times of conflict?

Politics impact us. Rifts in culture impact us. Rhetoric, uplifting or destructive, impacts us. Why? Because the Church is not a building. The Church is people, the people of God, who journey together in time and space.

I am well-aware of the swirling world of politics and how culture is impacted by politics. That awareness impacts my daily thoughts, my prayer and my preparation for preaching. I realize that I need to be fully committed to the Gospel *in* the world and not separated from it.

However, I do not believe it is in our best interest to preach against individuals or groups of people. It is in our best interest to preach the Gospel of Jesus, the truth for which it stands and the truth to which we are committed as followers of Jesus.

The Gospel tells us who are called to be as followers of Jesus. The Gospel is the servant of God amid the people of God. As Church, we are called to be servants of God and servants of the Gospel of Jesus.

Today’s Gospel is about the Baptism of Jesus and the beginning of his public ministry. What was going in the mind of Jesus as he approached his cousin, John, who had been baptizing in the Jordan? What was going on in John’s mind when he saw Jesus come to him for baptism?

With humility, John said, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” In whatever frame of mind Jesus found himself, he knew that his baptism would pave the way for baptism and the forgiveness of sin. The blessing from God came in the form of a dove and in the voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.”

Today, we are “well pleased”, as we will baptize Cassie Gonzales into the Christian Tradition. With the pouring of blessed water and the Trinitarian formula, “I baptize you in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”. Cassie will be baptized. She will follow in the footsteps of countless millions of people baptized into the Christian Tradition since the First Century.

With consecrated oil called Chrism, Cassie will be anointed and sealed as Christ’s own forever. From that moment on, she will be changed. There will be a fundamental change, as she becomes one with God in Jesus.

The grace of the Sacrament of Baptism can never be taken away. It is as if an indelible imprint will be made on Cassie’s soul, as she becomes Christ’s own in a very special way and part of the Christian family. Cassie’s parents and godparents will speak words on her behalf, and they realize the importance of their role in today’s special day in Cassie’s life.

I believe that we realize the importance of the Sacrament of Baptism and what it means for us to renew our baptismal vows whenever we baptize a person into the Christian Tradition. This font and the one at the entrance of the Church are here for a reason. They are symbols of living water and reminders of the life-giving waters of Baptism.

The water in both fonts is blessed water. Whenever we dip fingers into the font and make the Sign of the Cross, we recall the time in our lives when we, too, were made Christ’s own forever. Whether here or before or after prayers elsewhere, the Sign of the Cross is the sign of our commitment to God who is fully committed to us.

Commitment to God in Jesus means that we are committed to be *like* Jesus. It means that we are to live as Christians and work to be people of compassion, forgiveness and mercy. It means that we as individuals and as Church are to be servants of the Gospel.

The Gospel calls us to prayer and action to help make the world a better place. That is our call and a message of hope. It is a message which calls us to be people who seek truth, and people who live into being servants of the truth of the Gospel.

Today, Cassie’s baptism will remind us that all who are baptized are servants of the Gospel and are called to the truth of that Gospel. That truth calls us to stand against lies, hatred, racism, inequity and bullying of any kind and to embrace justice, mercy and love.

Let us pray that Cassie and all of us can and will live into truth of the Gospel of Jesus. The world can and will be better for it, and for that, we are grateful. Amen.