

HOMILY BAPTISM OF THE LORD YRA 2020

Today we are going to have some congregation participation. I have a very simple question for you. I want a few of you to give the first answer that comes to mind. “Who am I?” [Congregation will respond] If I asked each of you to answer that question about yourself, you would probably answer with the thing that seems most important to you at this time in your life. If you are newly married, you will probably answer “a spouse.” If you have minor children you are likely to respond “a parent.” If you are starting a new career or if your job is very important you are likely to respond with your occupation. For most of us our first response would not be “I am Christian,” but maybe that should be first.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. We remember when Jesus was given a baptism of repentance by John the Baptist. Jesus did not need a baptism of repentance because he did not sin, but I think he wanted to be in solidarity with us. This also marks the beginning of his public ministry and he reveals who he is. A voice from the heavens says: “You are my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.” I think it is also a time to remember our own Baptism and the meaning it has in our lives. In Baptism we become a new creation, we become Christian. Becoming a new creation is not terribly meaningful for most of us because most of us were baptized as infants. We do not remember the old creation. But Baptism is more than just washing away original sin. In Baptism we become Christian and become part of a Catholic community, and that is very important. What does it mean to be Christian? This is what Pope Francis said: “Being Christian is not just obeying orders, but means being in Christ, thinking like him, acting like him, loving like him, it means letting him take possession of our life and change it, transform it, and free it from the darkness of evil and sin.” We should think of being Christian first because it affects every other aspect of our lives in a profound way.

When you ask yourself: “Who am I?” all of the answers are important, but if you are Christian first, it affects how you live out all of the different aspects of yourself. You are the spouse that Jesus would be. You are the parent that Jesus would be. You are the teacher or secretary or the lawyer that Jesus would be. We sometimes carve out different areas of our lives where being Christian does not apply. “I cannot be Christian at work because I will never get promoted if I am not cut throat or I need to do some unethical things to keep my job.” Well, frequently this is not true in reality but a rationalization for taking the easy route. And if it is true, maybe it is what you need to do for now but maybe you need to look for a new job.

The other reason why being Christian first is so important is that everything else you list is going to change over time. You may say being a parent is first now if you have minor children but one day they will hopefully launch and leave home. Then you are not parent first anymore. If you see yourself as parent first, you will have a very difficult time when you become an empty nester. If you see yourself as your occupation first, you will be lost when you retire. If you see yourself as Christian first, these transitions will still be hard, but you will be able to move on to the next thing that Jesus has in store for you.

Being Christian in the way that Pope Francis defines it is very difficult. It would be way easier to just obey orders or just follow all of the rules. Being Christian will be challenging for the rest of our lives, but being Christian is what gives meaning to our lives. We will probably never be the spouse or the parent or the teacher that Jesus would be, but Jesus is the model. Jesus does not expect us to be perfect, but he wants us to be faithful. Jesus loves us unconditionally and sees what we have the potential to become. Jesus is saying to each one of us today: “_____, you are my beloved son/daughter, with whom I am well pleased.”