

HOMILY BAPTISM OF THE LORD

January 10, 2021

There is a book titled Quantum Change. The authors of the book interviewed people who had what they called a moment of great clarity that led them to make a decision that changed the course of their lives. The people all felt that they received a mystical message from outside of themselves, and each person's life was never the same after that. The interviewers interviewed their subjects again ten years after their experience, and their lives had been permanently changed. The people knew that they were going through a one way door, and there was no going back. I had that type of experience when I made the decision to enter the priesthood. I discerned it actively for two years with a spiritual director. I sat with it for a couple of years; but at one point, I had a moment of clarity that this was the right decision for me. I knew I would be accepted, and I knew I would go on to ordination; and for six years of seminary, I never doubted my decision, and I have never doubted in the 17 years since ordination. I knew there was no going back. I think it was a prompting by the Holy Spirit, but it was not a particularly mystical experience, but a moment of clarity that I needed. I was older, had several advanced degrees, owned a home and had a successful law practice. I had to walk away from all of that and start over; but once I had this moment of clarity, I never doubted the decision. If I had been just out of college, I could have tried seminary for a while and left if it did not feel right, and many young men did that. They kept telling me that I had six years to discern if this was right for me, and many of the seminarians were actively discerning but I never had any serious doubts. I did not create the experience, but I was open to it. If we are not open, we will miss it.

I think Jesus had a quantum change experience in the Gospel reading today. Scripture scholars have been speculating for many years why Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. He did not need a baptism of repentance because he had nothing to repent for, he never sinned. Some speculate that he may have wanted to just be one of us and be baptized with everyone else. That may be true. But maybe he needed a quantum change experience, a moment of clarity. Remember Jesus was fully human and fully divine. Up until now he had been living a normal life with a poor family in Nazareth. Maybe this experience at his baptism was that moment of clarity from the Holy Spirit that made it clear to him that he was to start his public ministry and his life would never be the same. There was no turning back to Nazareth.

I think we have these quantum change experiences in our lives. I have talked to married couples who have told me that they met their spouse and, at some time in the courtship, had a moment of clarity and knew that this was the person they would marry, build a life with, have a family with, and 50 or 60 years later they

are still together. There was no turning back. I have talked to people who have had a moment of clarity in choosing a career that required a major life change; and although this did not make logical sense, they were clear that it was right for them. I think this is the way the Holy Spirit can work in the big decisions of our lives.

I also think this is the way the Holy Spirit can work in the smaller decisions of our lives. When we make decisions that are totally rational and make sense, these can be our decisions. Sometimes we may think through something and come to a logical conclusion, but the Holy Spirit may be prompting you to do something very different. Did you ever think that this may not be the next most likely choice for me, the most logical choice, but I just know that this is what I should be doing? I think we need to be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. If we are not open to them, we will miss them.

Today we can be on information and option overload. We have to turn off the social media and the news and have some quiet time with the Lord to discern the working of the Holy Spirit. I suppose it is possible but I do not think the Holy Spirit usually speaks to you through social media. I think that can be where the information and option overload come from. Certainly, the most logical thing for me to do 20 years ago was not to enter the priesthood. I had built a whole life for myself and a successful professional career. Some of the people in my life at the time thought I had lost my mind. But I am glad I was open to the Holy Spirit. Look what I could have missed. Are you open to having a quantum change experience? Are you open to having a big or small moment of clarity?

Love & Peace,

Fr. Jim