

January 13, 2019

A Catholic Priest, a Baptist Preacher and a Rabbi were good friends. They'd get together two or three times a week for coffee at a coffee shop. One day, someone made the comment that preaching to people isn't really all that hard, a real challenge would be to preach to a bear. One thing led to another and they decided to do an experiment. They'd all go out in the woods, find a bear and preach to it and attempt to convert it. Seven days later they all came together to discuss their experience. Father Flannery had his arm in a sling, was on crutches, and had various bandages all over his body. He said, "Well, I went in the woods to find me a bear and when I found him I began to read to him from the Catechism. That bear wanted nothing to do with me and began to slap me around. So, I quickly grabbed my holy water, poured some on him and Holy Mother of God, he became as gentle as a lamb. The Bishop is coming out next week to give him confirmation." Reverend Billy Bob spoke next, he was in a wheel chair, had one arm and both legs in a cast, had an IV drip. He claimed, "Well brothers, you know that we don't pour water, I went out and I found me a bear and then I began to read to that bear from God's Holy Word! That bear wanted nothing to do with me so I took hold of him and we began to wrestle. We wrestled down one hill, up another, down another until we came to a creek. I quickly dunked him and baptized him and you know what? Just like you said, he became as gentle as a lamb. We spent the rest of the day praising God, Alleluia!" The Priest and the Reverend both looked down at the Rabbi who was lying in a hospital, his body was in a cast with traction, IV's, monitors running all over the place, really bad shape. They looked at him and said, "Well?" He said, "Well, looking back, circumcision may not have been the best way to start out.

Ancient peoples had a way of looking at the universe, much much much different than you and I do. We have thousands of years of people looking at telescopes, looking at stars and all of that. But for them, the stars were just holes in the sky. There were like three pancakes, separated. The top pancake was where God lived, called the world of God. The middle world is where you and I live, the earth, the world of the living. The bottom world, the bottom pancake was the world of the dead, and they never mixed, they never opened unto each other. So when we look at the baptism today of Jesus, we have to keep that in mind. Because you know, following the sin of Adam and Eve, the middle world, the world we live in became more and more evil with each passing year. Holy people prayed to God to come down and do something. The prophet Isaiah said, "Why don't you tear open the sky and come down?" The psalmist said, "Oh Lord, tear open the sky and come down." They wanted that division to be torn apart so that God would come into the world and straighten it up. So we get the baptism of Jesus. By the way, this is the last day of the Christmas season. This is the day when your Christmas decorations "should" have come down, but because of peer pressure and the neighborhood, you probably already took them down. But in our story, first the sky opens above Jesus: God is making an appearance, second a dove descends from the sky, third a voice speaks out, "You are my beloved Son." The sky opens and in the light of what we just said about the world being viewed as pancakes, it means God is now tearing open the sky. God is now coming down into the world to do something about this horrible horrible mess. In other words, the appearance and baptism of Jesus in the Jordan marked the dawn of a new era in human history. The second event: The Holy Spirit of God in the form of a dove, descends from the open sky and hovers over Jesus. This is where we get that image of a dove as the Holy Spirit. It recalls the original creation of the world, when God breathed on the world sending out the Holy Spirit like a dove over the waters, and everything was created anew. So now, the dove hovering over Jesus in the water reveals that a new creation is about to take place. God is about to recreate our world, make it new

again. He is going to fulfill what He said to the prophet Isaiah, "I am about to create a new earth, the things of the past shall not be remembered or come to mind. The third and final event: the sky opening, the dove comes down, and God says specifically, "You are my beloved Son." It reveals Jesus to be the Son of God, it reveals Jesus to be the new Adam, the first-born creature of the new creation. Saint Paul says, "The first man Adam, was from the earth." He was earthly. "The second man, Jesus from heaven." He was heavenly. "Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one, we also bear the image of the heavenly one." These three _____ things take place, at the time of Jesus being baptized. Now Jesus didn't need to be baptized, He didn't have sins to be forgiven, He didn't have to be reunited with the Father. But, Jesus did this for another reason. He did this to change water. Water could wash away dirt and grime, it could wash the outside. But once Jesus was baptized it changed so it was able to take away sin on the soul, the inside. It had a new function, a new purpose. Anything Jesus touched in this world, took on a new purpose, a new creation. Work started becoming a way to get to heaven, not just to provide for your family, it wasn't a curse anymore, like God did to Adam in the garden of Eden when he sinned. Whatever Jesus touched, it became different.

Baptism is the entrance sacrament, it's the beginning of the life with the Church. It's the beginning of the life of grace. To be baptized means you have the ability to get the other sacraments. Without baptism you can't be of the other sacraments because we have to be initiated. The sacraments are divided into the sacraments of initiation: baptism, first communion, confirmation. You have to have all three to be fully initiated. Does it mean you have to have all three to be practicing? No, but all three means you're formally initiated, completely and totally. There's other ones of healing, sacraments of healing: we call the anointing of the sick, confession heals the soul. And then there's the two of service. God says, "Look, it's about prayer and action, it's about accepting Me and doing something with Me." We are not supposed to be like Buddha and just sit there and look at our bellies and say, "I'm fulfilled, I'm enlightened." No. We have to do something and so God gives us two sacraments of service: marriage, holy orders. So that we live our life of grace, our life of the spiritual world in the world today. We're not able to just say, "Okay, I'm married, We're going to lock the door and that's it. Or, "I'm a priest, I'm going to just sit there and pray for the rest of my life." No, it's about service so we have that as well. It all comes with baptism and the thing is, today when we see what happens with Jesus, it doesn't just happen with Jesus. He was the first of the new creation, all of us who are baptized are members of that new creation. When we were baptized: baby, child, adult, heaven opened and God bridged the gap between natural and supernatural. We now became citizens of both realms. The Holy Spirit came down and we became new creations. Even the sacrament of baptism, you have become a new creation, you have clothed yourself in the white garb that represents that. We didn't hear it, but it happened. God said, "You are my beloved son, you are my beloved daughter, you are now a member of my family, just like Jesus." You have the same abilities as Jesus, (well, you can't rise from the dead) we have the same abilities. We have power over Satan, we have power over temptation, we have power over sin, we have tremendous power. But you know, we don't think of that. We don't think that we are different by baptism than other people that don't have baptism. We never think of that. We don't think that we are children of God, we keep thinking about our human nature, we don't think about the supernatural nature. We never take time to think about who we truly are and what we truly are. On this day of the baptism of Jesus, this is what the Church wants us to think about. God came down and said, "You are my beloved son, you are my beloved daughter." No different than Jesus because in the Jewish world, there's no difference between adoption and biological, they're equal. So when Saint Paul says, "We are children by adoption." He's not saying we're second class citizens, he's saying we are equal to

Jesus in the life of God, in the face of God, in the mind of God. So by nature of our baptism we have been recreated anew and it's time we start looking at that and saying, "I claim that."

God bless you.