

2021 Homily for the Baptism of the Lord, January 10th

Towards the end of the first reading we heard – “so the word that goes from my mouth does not return to me empty without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do.” Isaiah wrote about the effectiveness of God’s word during the dark days after the destruction of Jerusalem and 5 centuries before the birth of Christ. We have witnessed the destructive power of the spoken word in some dark days recently. We have also witnessed the consequences of not speaking out to condemn violence and insurrection in a country which prides itself on democracy, justice and freedom, demonstrating how fragile peace can be when powerful people abuse their power.

It was only last Wednesday when we celebrated the Epiphany and the arrival of the visitors from the East paying homage to the infant king of the Jews. They were warned not to return to King Herod who would abuse his power with the murder of the Innocents. Four days later we celebrate the baptism of the same infant king of the Jews, not as an infant but as an adult, baptised in the Jordan by John the Baptist. It was when he came up out of the water that the heavens were torn open, the Spirit descended like a dove on him and he heard a voice from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you.’ This is how Mark introduces us to Jesus, who is missioned by the Father and empowered by the Spirit to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Coming out of the waters of baptism Jesus begins his public ministry.

Water was mentioned in the first reading from Isaiah, inviting the thirsty to drink, the hungry to buy corn without money. Almost too good to be true. And we think of those people today who have to carry jars of water often for hours if they are to survive, or people who have no money to buy food. The Rohingya in Bangladesh, wanting to work but unable to do so. Many Bangladeshi people give up a meal a day so the Rohingya can eat. Then there is the Co-op run by Fr Luis’ team in Nicaragua, the food banks in our own country. Examples of people putting the vision of Isaiah into action.

But there is another type of food which is the word of God guiding us in our every day lives. If we listen to the word, if we follow the word spoken in the gospel then we will be fulfilled, we will enjoy the satisfaction that comes from a delicious meal shared with others. If we are going down the wrong path, God’s word can bring us back as we experience God’s forgiveness. We see this when people opposed to each other work for reconciliation and peace as recently in the Cameroons.

We received the same Spirit at our own baptism and are numbered among the Beloved of God. The waters of Baptism open up the whole sacramental life of the Church which enables us to imitate the sacrificial, life giving love of Jesus who came not to be served but to serve, even to shedding his blood. John in the second reading mentions the Spirit, the water and the blood, as bearing witness to Jesus’ mission. Water and blood so essential for life, and the Spirit for helping us to live life to the full by helping to transform our own lives and the lives of those most in need.

Bidding Prayers for Sunday January 10th, The Baptism of the Lord

Celebrant:

We have been baptised with the Holy Spirit and as the disciples of Christ we are urged to pray for the needs of all people, and so with confidence we pray.

Reader:

For the Church – that the Church will help us all to have a deeper appreciation of both the rights and responsibilities of baptism as we continue to proclaim God's kingdom on earth by reaching out to those in most need.

Lord in your mercy

For world leaders – that they will seek to promote peace based on justice and work for a greater distribution of the world's resources and protect people where water is scarce, polluted or wasted.

Lord in your mercy

For all those suffering from dementia – that they and their families and carers will receive the care and support they need, especially when times are very difficult.

Lord in your mercy

For a speedy distribution of the vaccines against the Coronavirus in our own countries and a willingness to provide vaccines to people in the developing world.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the current pandemic, and May Collins whose Requiem Mass will be celebrated on Monday, Fr Geoffrey Parfitt a retired priest of the diocese whose funeral takes place on Wednesday, and Edward Michael Maloney, Joseph Collins, Chester Pereira, Louise Keogh, Arthur Clifford and William Joseph Shea whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

Lord Jesus, you are the Father's beloved Son, his anointed one, our Saviour. Inspire us to always act on the grace bestowed in baptism and beckon us to drink from the springs of eternal salvation. You who live and reign for ever and ever. Amen