

Homily by Deacon Jim Olshefski
Baptism of the Lord – Year C
January 9, 2022

Mary and I are involved in the "marriage preparation ministry" at the Cathedral. In that capacity, we meet engaged couples who are ready to begin the rest of their lives together, as husband and wife, through the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony here at the Cathedral. Sometimes, we're invited to attend the wedding and reception. At the wedding reception, it's traditional for the Maid of Honor and the Best Man to offer a "toast" to the newly married couple. Oftentimes, the fathers of the bride and the groom also offer a toast. It's a touching moment when "Dad" shares a few words about his daughter or son whom he loves very much and of whom he is very proud. The father provides special insight into someone he knows extremely well but who may not be so well known by the various guests at the gathering.

In today's gospel, a voice from heaven, God the Father, took the opportunity to offer a "toast" to Jesus after his baptism. The toast was short and sweet: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

This toast makes allusions to the Old Testament that tells us something about who Jesus is:

- Firstly, "God's son" was a term used to describe King David, who had a special relationship with God and a very important role in leading the people of Israel. "Sonship" was a moniker bestowed on David's descendants, including the promised Messiah who would someday save God's people. So, when God referred to Jesus as his Son those gathered on the banks of the Jordan River knew what it meant.
- Secondly, the Father referred to Jesus as his "beloved." The Father harkened back in human history to Isaac, the beloved son of Abraham. Abraham and Isaac are patriarchs of the people of Israel. God wanted the people to know that Jesus was part of his plan from the very beginning. Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and all who would follow.
- God the Father concluded: "With you I am well pleased." This refers to the faithful servant of whom it would be prophesied in the Servant Songs of Isaiah in chapters subsequent to today's first reading. This faithful servant would be rejected by his own people and endure great hardship AND in whom God "was well pleased."

Those who witnessed the scene at the Jordan River that day would understand all of these references to Messiah, Isaac and the faithful servant but they probably would have been bewildered because Jesus, of whom God had spoken, was a poor peasant from Galilee. They must have wondered: How could he be a Messiah for his people? Additionally, the Isaiah reference to the faithful servant would have added to their confusion since Isaiah had prophesied that the faithful servant would be scorned; he would be a "suffering servant." They must have wondered how an individual could be a Messiah if people refused to listen to his words!

Throughout his public ministry, the first followers of Jesus would gradually grow in their understanding of God's toast. Eventually, they learned that Jesus was the Messiah and the faithful, suffering servant by watching his actions and listening to his words.

And so it is with us. In our own baptism, our parents and godparents dedicated us to God and accepted the task of transmitting the Catholic faith to us. Now, as adults, we're called to continue to grow in that faith. Throughout the rest of this liturgical year, as we journey through Luke's gospel, we'll be part of Christ's life here on earth. We'll also grow in our understanding of God's toast. We, too, will learn what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah and the faithful, suffering servant, as we watch his actions and listen to his words. In St. Paul's letter to Titus, we're challenged to "live temperately, justly, and devoutly," to put the lessons we learn from the teachings of Jesus into practice in our daily lives; to share, with our brothers and sisters, the blessings we have received and thereby "renew the face of the earth." Having lived so, when our pilgrimage on this earth is finished, may we hear the Lord's toast to us: "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Come, share in your master's joy!"