

### **January 10, 2016 Baptism of the Lord Homily:**

My brothers and sisters, in the days of my youth, one magazine was quite popular with schoolchildren. Even yours truly had an annual subscription. Some of you may be of an age to remember the magazine of fond memory: "Highlights". Featured on the back cover of each issue was a puzzle: "What's wrong with this picture?" It depicted a typical scene of children playing. Unusual objects take the place of normal things throughout the picture. The reader is instructed to find the various objects that are wrong or out of place. An example might be a frying pan. Certainly, such an object would be out of place on a school playground! That alone is an explanation of what is wrong with the picture!

Today we celebrate the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. It is one of the Luminous Mysteries, a mystery of light. Jesus is in the public eye for the first time. The event marks the beginning of his ministry. In view of the gospel reading just proclaimed, we may ask the question..." What's wrong with this picture" in St. Luke's account of this extraordinary event? At first glance, Our Blessed Lord seems out of place!

In the gospel, he unexpectedly stands on the banks of the Jordan River with all those seeking a baptism of repentance from John the Baptist. The One without sin, the One who is the living Kingdom of God in his own person joins those who recognize, in themselves, a need for forgiveness, mercy and a kind word of understanding and sympathy. Jesus, though sinless, wills to immerse himself in the human condition and places himself among sinners. He is in solidarity with them!

If you have ever been lost in a crowd of people, as I have many, many times, you'll appreciate the appalling sense of loneliness, anonymity, and unimportance. But, of course, it is also sometimes the case that we do not wish to be noticed! We choose to be concealed!

What lessons can we derive from St. Luke's account (Lk.3:21) of this mysterious event?

First, it is a prayer experience. In Luke, Jesus is at prayer before all the important events in his life. One need only consider The Transfiguration, the choosing of the twelve apostles and the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane... Let us ask ourselves: "Do we pray before all the important moments in our life?"

Second, the Baptist is astounded that the Son of God, whom he refers to as the "Lamb of God" comes toward him. Not surprisingly, John tries to prevent him. Likely exasperated, he cries, "It is I who should be baptized by you and yet you are coming to me" (Mt.3:14). Time and again, the evangelists remind us of the central mystery of our faith: God draws near to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Perhaps this is an appropriate time to appreciate the presence of Our Divine Lord in the Eucharist we celebrate in this church. Christ, indeed, draws close to us!

Third, although Jesus remained hidden in the crowd, the Heavenly Father still recognized him. And He was pleased. "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased" (Lk.3:22). A key question: Does the Eternal Father recognize us as disciples of his beloved Son? Do we choose to hide in the crowd and refuse to come into the open to witness to our faith in Jesus? Do we shun others for whatever reason?

If one were to ask us, "What is wrong with Luke's picture of the baptism of Jesus." Let our response be bold and forthright. "Nothing is wrong with the picture! It is all part of God's plan! And all of us are the beneficiaries!"

Amen.