

January 11, 2015 Baptism of the Lord Homily

Brothers and sisters, Featured in many television crime dramas of the not-to-distant past is the so-called police line-up. Someone who is alleged to have committed a felonious crime stands shoulder to shoulder with others, mostly former convicts found guilty of having committed past offenses against the law.

The witness to the crime is asked to identify the guilty party. Sometimes, in order to heighten suspense, the witness fingers the wrong person. Try to imagine an innocent man, who has a spotless record, standing in the line-up. Even more incredible is the desire of such an innocent to stand willingly near a notorious felon. And what if the innocent man is identified as the criminal? It makes for a most interesting story!

In the book of the Prophet Isaiah there is a mysterious reference to a "suffering Servant" who, though innocent, would be counted among the wicked because he, himself, bears the sins of many (Is.53:11-12) Over the centuries, Christians recognize in this figure the person of Jesus Christ. In today's gospel reading (Mk.1:7-11) Jesus begins his public ministry by going to the River Jordon to receive from John the baptizer the baptism of repentance and conversion.

Jesus, the Holy One of God and sinless, has no need of repentance and conversion. Nevertheless, He lets Himself be treated as a sinner. He stands in line with the rabble of Jewish society. In doing so, he shows his solidarity with us. By immersing himself in the River Jordon, Jesus sets an extraordinary example for us! We recall the words of the Apostle Paul to the early Christian community at Corinth: "For our sake he made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God". Jesus immerses himself in the life of his own people. He stands shoulder to shoulder with us as well. He shows no disdain for the wicked, ourselves included!

The gospel reading today, on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, concludes the Christmas season. There is a Trinitarian dimension to this reading. Jesus is the Beloved Son of the eternal Father (Mk.1:11). The One who appears in the form of a dove is the Holy Spirit. (Mk.1:10).

One powerful message that we, as Christians, can derive from this gospel, is the mystery of our own baptism. We, too, have been anointed with the Spirit. Each one of us is beloved of God and highly favored by Him. In addition, we have each been entrusted with a mission, True, It is unlikely we will ever hear an audible voice from heaven praising our discipleship, but we can be assured in our prayers of confirmation from the One who calls us. "You are my son (daughter); my favor rests on you!"

As the "Ordinary time" of the church begins, let us set out on our pilgrimage with Jesus in our midst. We are surely in good company. Amen!