

January 12, 2014 What's Wrong with This Picture Homily

Dear brothers and sisters, in the early decades of the last century a popular game, actually a puzzle, turned up in many newspapers and popular magazines. Years later, this puzzle was a feature in the monthly magazine for children, "Hi-Lights."

Some of you may remember "What's wrong with this picture". A drawing or photograph appeared in which the reader was asked to pick out the flaws and imperfections, which was the whole point of the game. It might be a dog wearing a pair of shoes, a misspelled word, a man reading his newspaper upside down or a bat in flight in the early afternoon sun. The reader must discover what is implausible and unconvincing in the picture.

The scene of Christ's baptism in the Jordan River marks the beginning of his public ministry. One may ask, "What is wrong with this picture? The One who is sinless and has nothing of which to repent steps into the place of sinners. He stands shoulder to shoulder with tax collectors, prostitutes and others who are spiritually lost and seeking the Baptist's baptism of repentance. Is it any wonder that John is embarrassed and bewildered? The Baptist cries, "It is I who ought to be baptized by you, and yet you come to me!" (Mt.3:14).

The whole purpose of Christ's ministry is to go to the lost, the sick, the forgotten and the sinful in order to bring the light of God's love. In order to save us, God the Son bent low and stood with us in the muck and mud of our life. He will bear the sins of humanity. And if there is something wrong with this picture, please consider another unexpected and shocking one. At the climax of his ministry on the cross, Jesus is crucified between two thieves! Unthinkable! The feast of Christ's baptism is truly a celebration of God's great humility! Jesus stoops low in order to draw us to Him.

What lessons can we Christians derive from today's gospel?

First, the one who humbles himself is exalted. Jesus approves of John's ministry and praises those who have come to him for a blessing.

Second, Jesus has come to unite Himself with sinners, that is to say, each one of us. We have no cause to stand apart from those who confess their misdeeds and desire to be purified.

Third, Jesus praises the repentance of sinners.

And finally, the baptism of Our Lord is a reminder of our own baptism in which we were baptized into Christ. It also calls to mind our salvation and deliverance from sin, which damages the Divine Image in our souls.

Christ came so that we may have life, and have it abundantly. (Jn.10:10).

Amen