

Barely two weeks ago it was Christmas morning. I'm sure you remember that big thing you had set up and decorated in your house, you know, the Christmas tree, and all those presents and wrapping paper all over the place that morning. How about now, where is that tree now? I see. It's been put away or thrown out on the sidewalk waiting to be picked up and recycled. And the room where it was, are the presents still all over the place? Oh, the presents are all put away, the wrapping paper is cleaned up, and the room is back to normal. I see. And the big nativity scene set up on the lawn by Msgr. Pollard Hall in addition to the one by the Burrough Hall? They are both about to be taken down and put into storage. The Christmas trees in the church are in the process of being taken down this week. Also down by the Burrough Hall, the lights on the big town tree will soon be turned off, if it has not happened already. And all those houses decorated with pretty lights, one by one the owners are taking them down and putting them away until next Christmastime. Little by little everything is being taken down and put away until next year. And what about Christmas carols, which had been on the radio and in stores since the day after Hallowe'en? There hasn't been one played on the radio since the day after Christmas. Everything is getting back to normal.

That's right, ladies & gentlemen, the Christmas season is over. Advent is finished. The long wait and preparation for Jesus' coming is finished. We celebrated His birth on Christmas Day. We gave and received a whole lot of presents from a whole lot of people. Hopefully, you've written all your thank you notes by now. We've even had the Feast of Mary the Mother of God on New Year's Day and the Feast of Epiphany last week when Mrs. Quinlin told you about the wise men who came to honor the baby Jesus. We've taken the tree down and the other decorations. As long as the holiday season has become, it's gone in the blink of an eye. And we've gone back to school and work. Yes, I know. It's a real

bummer when Christmas is over, isn't it? But it's *time* for it. Christmas will come again (in just 50 weeks). For now it's *time* to get back to regular life.

In the Church too, it's time to get back to normal. That means it's time to get back to the *teachings* of Jesus, to *listening* to Jesus. In the Church, when it's not a special holy season or feast, remember that the Church calls it Ordinary Time, which starts next week with the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time. But what really is the first Sunday in Ordinary time is called the Baptism of Jesus Christ, which is the beginning of his ministry. We celebrate that day today.

Our first reading comes from the Old Testament, from the book of Isaiah. That's right, we're back to Isaiah, back to normal. There are four sections in the book of Isaiah called the Suffering Servant Songs. These sections talk about a special chosen servant of God who will gather the people of Israel and be a light to all nations, being faithful to God through suffering and death. Does that sound familiar, the suffering and dying for us part? Might Isaiah be talking about Jesus, who suffered and died for us? And remember that Isaiah lived more than 700 years before Jesus was born. So how could he know about who Jesus would be and what He would do? Well, remember that Isaiah was a prophet. And again, ladies & gentlemen, prophets were people who heard the word of God and told it to the people.

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah (Isa 42:1-2, 4, 6-7).

Here is my servant! I have made him strong. He is my chosen one, and I am pleased with him. ¶ I will give him my Spirit, and he will bring justice to the nations. He won't shout or yell or call out in the streets. He won't give up until he brings justice to all on earth, and people in foreign lands long for his teaching. ¶ I, the Lord, choose you because of my kindness, and I am here at your side. I created and appointed you to bring light and my promise of hope to the nations. You will give sight to the blind

and set prisoners free from the dark dungeons. ¶ The word of the Lord.

So what does Isaiah say about the servant. “He is my chosen one, and I am pleased with him,” “...he will bring justice to nations.” It sure sounds a lot like Jesus. We as *Christians* believe that the servant in Isaiah’s book is indeed Jesus as He begins His ministry with His baptism. During Jesus’ time on this earth He did show that He certainly could be Isaiah’s suffering servant. He brought sight to the blind and freedom to prisoners of darkness. And he suffered for the sins of all people. OR could Isaiah be referring to you or me? Did any of you notice the change in the pronouns during the reading? “*He* is my servant...*He* is my chosen one...I will give *him* my spirit...” Then all of a sudden, “I, the Lord, choose *you*...I am here at *your* side...I created and appointed *you*...” So whom is Isaiah talking about, Jesus or you and me, or perhaps both?

We turn now to today’s responsorial psalm (Psalm 29:3-4,9-10)

The Lord will bless His people with peace.

The Lord will bless His people with peace.

The voice of the Lord echoes over the oceans. He thunders above the roar of the raging seas, and his voice is mighty and marvelous.

The Lord will bless His people with peace.

The glorious Lord God thunders above the roar of the raging seas, and the temple is filled with shouts of praise. The Lord rules on his throne, king forever.

The Lord will bless His people with peace.

The psalmist tells us that God's voice is the mighty thunder, making mountains tremble with fear, shaking the desert. It is so powerful that it drowns out the noise of the raging sea. The power of God's word can overshadow everything...if you listen to it. This is not the only time in today's scripture that we hear about the voice of God. Wait for it.

The second reading today comes from the Acts of the Apostles, which is the story of the early Church right after Jesus died. We read a lot from the Acts of the Apostles during the Easter Season, which is still about 3 months from now (*only* 3 months!). In today's reading from Acts, St. Peter speaks to Cornelius and his relatives and friends just before the Holy Spirit comes down upon them on the first Pentecost.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 10:34-38).

Peter said to Cornelius and his household: "Now I am certain that God treats all people alike. God is pleased with all who worship Him and do right, no matter what nation they come from. This is the same message that God gave to the people of Israel (REMEMBER THE READING FROM ISAIAH), when He sent Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, to offer peace to them. ¶ "You surely know what happened everywhere in Judea. It all began in Galilee after John had told everyone to be baptized. God gave the Holy Spirit and power to Jesus from Nazareth. He was with Jesus, as he went around doing good works and healing everyone who was under the power of the devil." ¶ The word of the Lord.

St. Peter's talk with Cornelius is important for two reasons. First, he tells us that Jesus came not only for the Jews, but for all people, anyone with a good heart. How do you think Peter knew this? Well, he learned it directly from Jesus. But what did Isaiah just say about Jesus, er, the suffering servant? "He won't give up until he brings justice to *all* on earth." Second, St. Peter explains to us that

Jesus showed us that God's message was one of peace and love, a message which begins in the Jordan River when St. John baptizes Jesus, which is what today's Gospel reading is all about. Today's reading from St. Luke is actually one of the best examples of how we can hear the word of God through the gospel.

Alleluia, Alleluia. Alleluia, Alleluia.

John said: One mightier than I is coming;
He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

Alleluia, Alleluia.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke (Luke 3:15-16, 21-22).

Everyone became excited and wondered, "Could John be the Messiah?" ¶ John said, "I am just baptizing you with water. But someone more powerful is going to come, and I am not good enough even to untie his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¶ After everyone else had been baptized, Jesus himself was baptized. As He prayed, the sky opened up, and the Holy Spirit came down upon Him in the form of a dove. A voice from heaven said, "You are My own dear Son, and I am pleased with You." ¶ The gospel of the Lord.

So the people asked if John the Baptist was the Messiah, which is the Hebrew word for the Savior, the Christ. John answered them, "I am just baptizing you with water. But someone more powerful is going to come, and I am not good enough even to untie His sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." Then what happened?

Remember what we just heard in Isaiah's reading? "Here is my servant...He is my chosen one, and I am pleased with him." So after John's answer (above), Jesus came to be baptized. Then "a

voice from heaven said, 'You are My own dear Son, and I am pleased with You.'" So Isaiah's reading predicts what was to happen when Jesus was baptized and began His ministry. Two different times we hear about the voice of God in today's scripture. Today's psalm talks about the power of the voice of God, and in Luke's gospel we actually hear the voice of God tell us that Jesus is His Son. In fact, in today's gospel we witness one of the few times in the bible that all three persons of God are present together. The voice belongs to God the Father, Jesus is God the Son, and the dove represents God the Holy Spirit, all present together, all at the same time. So just as was predicted by Isaiah, God sent His Son Jesus to bring justice to all the earth, and when He was baptized, the thundering voice of God Himself told us how pleased He was with His Son. Now that the Christmas season is finished, now that Jesus, "the Lord is come," God wants us to listen to what Jesus is going to tell us.

And that, girls and boys, is the lesson in today's readings.

Instead of the Creed, on the feast of our Lord's baptism, it is customary in the church that we renew *our* baptismal vows, which you obviously don't remember because at your baptism you were babies, so your godparents answered for you. Today it is *your* turn. To each of the questions below, *you* respond, "I do." Listen carefully. After the first three questions, it should all start to sound pretty familiar.

Do you reject Satan?

R. I do.

And all his works?

R. I do.

And all his empty promises?

R. I do.

Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth?

R. I do.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?

R. I do.

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

R. I do.

God, the all-powerful Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has given us a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit and forgiven all our sins. May he also keep us faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ for ever and ever.

R. Amen.

Joseph Calderone

The Baptism of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, 2022