

Homily: Jan. 9, 2022

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

We just heard John the Baptist proclaim that Jesus would be doing more than baptizing with water. “Jesus will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and FIRE.” We may remember that the Holy Spirit appeared at the beginning process of all of creation. God’s spirit is creative, alive and fearless. Secondly, we recall how the fire of the Holy Spirit turned the apostles into new men at Pentecost. Witnesses thought they were drunk because they were so alive and ON FIRE.

So this feast of the Lord’s baptism reminds us that we are baptized into the Jesus, the baptizer of Holy Spirit and fire. It is this Jesus, whom God proclaimed as his beloved Son in whom he is well pleased—is delighted in. That baptismal proclamation is very essential for us as Christians. Our first status is that of “beloved.” John the evangelist wrote in his first letter, “We love because God first loved us.” We love because we are BELOVED.

So our baptism ought to help us live as people with a creative spirit and on fire for God. Our baptism into discipleship of the divinely proclaimed BELOVED invites us see ourselves and other baptized persons as BELOVED. Along with all other human beings, we are also BELOVED, because we are loved [by God and others] even before we could love intentionally.

It is so hard for many of us to really believe that God sees us as beloved. I would suggest as a good meditation for you and me, especially today or during this new week, still at the beginning of 2022—to take some time to understand something as huge as “I am beloved.” We never will totally understand love in its entirety, but we do well to at least understand as much as we can understand. How am I beloved? Am I aware, for instance, that the care my mother took during her pregnancy with me so as not to fall, to eat well and be calm, was my initial experience of being loved. My parents’ attention to me by feeding me milk and cleaning my diapers was love given to me. Wasn’t God loving me whenever I smelled roses, heard bird songs, enjoyed the wonderful aroma of fresh rain and delighted in seeing wonderful sunrises and sunsets? Yes, because there I enjoyed God’s voice, breath and artistry out of love for me and for all?

Even though we are flawed and limited human beings, we are God's beloved. And when we can drink in that truth and reality, we become creative and ON FIRE for God, for our creation and for all others, who too are God's beloved—believers and unbelievers, my skin color and other colors, my race and not my race—we are beloved.

Jesus went on as the beloved to turn water into wine. We, his disciples, are to turn ordinary water into wine; We are, with the help of Jesus' spirit, to turn ordinary and messy life into a beautiful kingdom of God. We are to heal divisions, racism, and conflicts by bringing in the beautiful and heavenly world of unity, respect and peace. That takes creativity. That takes FIRE AND PASSION which give us courage and strength to do what sometimes seems hopeless and impossible. But with God, and in God, all is possible.

The heavens opened and a voice was heard by all, "You are my beloved daughter and son."