

II EPIPHANY 2015
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
ROMANS 12.6 ST. MARK 1.1

✠

It was the most perfect act of humility...God became like us...a human being...he walked among us so one day we might walk with him in heaven.

During the Epiphany Season we talk about the manifestations...the striking appearances Jesus makes...that show us in words and signs and actions...who he is...God's own dear Son.

Last week we saw Jesus as the precocious adolescent boy who stayed behind chatting with the teachers while his parents started the trip home. This week Jesus comes to his cousin John to get baptized. Next week Paul gets knocked off his horse in a close encounter of the personal kind...with Jesus himself.

All three of the Synoptic Gospel writers record the Baptism of Jesus. Matthew gives the most comprehensive account...in which John the Baptist tells Jesus he has no business baptizing him...it should be the other way around. Jesus simply tells John this is all part of God's plan and to do as he asks.

The Baptism of Jesus is an epiphany...a striking appearance. Jesus did not need to get baptized. He cannot sin. Why then did he ask John to baptize him? Jesus did not get baptized for his own benefit...he got baptized for ours. It was a public act of humility...a very human act of humility...and the moment when God the Father identifies Jesus as his own dear Son whom he loves.

John the Baptist went around the countryside encouraging people to turn away from sin and bad behavior. He baptized people with water...a sign they were starting fresh. But John knew the limitations of his own baptism...he knew its effects were temporary.

John told the people he was only the mouthpiece for someone coming after him...someone who was greater than him...someone who was so great he wasn't even good enough to untie his shoes. And when he came he would baptize people with water and the Holy Spirit...and their sins would be forgiven once and for all.

Jesus' baptism by water and the Holy Spirit sets the pattern for our own baptisms by water and the Holy Spirit. Jesus' baptism was the pivotal moment in his life during which God the Father first calls him his own dear Son. Jesus did not become God at his baptism...he was already God...made of the same stuff the Father is made of...Godhood. It was an epiphany...a visible and tangible manifestation of God to the world.

Our own baptism by water and the Holy Spirit are equally pivotal moments in our own lives. In baptism our sins are forgiven and our lives are forever changed. We become full members of the Church---the Body of Christ. During the Mass we pray that God will bless us so that---we may be made one body with him, that he may dwell in us, and we in him.

Baptism is only done once and can never be repeated. It leaves its permanent mark on us. Our sin is forgiven and we get God's Holy Spirit to help us do what is right and good. But we still have free will...we can choose to do what is right and good...we can also choose to do what is wrong and bad. The choice is ours.

In his Letter to the Romans Saint Paul tells us we should try to emulate Jesus' humility in everything we do and to use the specific gifts God gives us in the right way. He tells us to give generously, to show kindness cheerfully, to work hard and to not be lazy, to be careful not to abuse the authority we have been given over others, to be patient in our troubles, and to be joyful in everything we do because of the hope we have in Jesus.

When we think about what Saint Paul is talking about we come to realize he is talking about making our lives epiphanies...striking appearances...for Jesus. Our baptism gives us the tools we need to accomplish God's intended purpose for our lives, with the same kind of humility Jesus showed.

Jesus got baptized for our benefit...an epiphany...a striking appearance...that shows us who he is. What we must ask ourselves today is what kind of epiphanies...striking appearances...can we be for Jesus?

✠