

Homily for 06.23.13

Zechariah 12:10-11; 13:1

Galatians 3:26-29

Luke 9:18-24

Baptism is the first of the seven sacraments and is the “door” which gives access to the other sacraments. It is one of the three sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. It is a welcoming rite for a Christian into the Christian community.

St. Paul speaks of baptism in the second reading from his letter to the Galatians. He states, “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.” Those of us who are baptized have put on Christ as our model and example of our way of life. We live in Him and through Him and find our being in Him. Even Jesus Christ was baptized by John in the River Jordan. I was fortunate to be at the site where Jesus was baptized at the River Jordan.

I recently returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land that was led by Father Mike Miller. We visited many holy sites in Israel. One of the sites we visited was a site next to the Jordan River. Recent archeological evidence reveals that this was mostly likely the site where John baptized Jesus at the River Jordan. It was such a blessing and a moving emotional experience for me to be at the place where Jesus was baptized.

There are several symbols used in the rite of baptism: the cross, the Holy Oils, the baptismal garment, the lighted candle, and the water. Water, is the central symbol in Baptism. Water is a sign of life and fruitfulness as well as death and destruction. Water gives life, saves life, and takes life away. Water reminds us that it is God who gives us life. Using water in Baptism reminds us of this power and helps us to experience our dying with Christ and our rising with him to a new life. In baptism, the cleansing water by the power of the Holy Spirit washes away every stain of sin, original and personal, and makes us sharers in God’s own life. This is not just for when we are baptized but for all of our life.

The symbol of water is a very powerful symbol. Not only do we wash with water, but we drink water and it gives us life as Jesus gives us life. Water is essential to life. Farmers use water to grow their crops. Ranchers use water to water their livestock. Water can also cause

death. Think of the power of the water in a tsunami and how it can kill people and cause widespread destruction. Water can give life and it can take life. Just like our lives are dependent on water, our lives are dependent on God. For us, life is living in love, mercy, forgiveness, and justice. Death is living in doubt, despair, manipulation and deceit.

Light like water, is essential for life. In baptism, the lighted candle lit from the Easter candle is a sign of the risen Christ. The lighted candle reminds all that the baptized is welcomed into the Church to participate with them being the “light of the world”. The candle is a visible reminder that this light of Christ is to be kept burning all through life, a light shining in what is sometimes a dark world.

St. Paul says in his letter that we have clothed ourselves with Christ. In Baptism, a white garment is placed on the newly baptized, a sign of new status. It symbolizes that she or he has put on new life as a child of God and is now a new creation. White is a symbol of transition and change of purity and cleansing. The white garment in Baptism is a visible sign of putting on Christ. White symbolizes that the stain of Original sin is no longer upon the baptized whose soul is wiped cleaned by the sacrament of Baptism. The baptized is now a child of God and that heaven is opened to them. How we dress depends on what we are doing. In baptism, we put on a white garment because of what we are doing, following Christ. White is the color for holiness. God puts holiness in us.

So, my brothers and sisters, those of us who are baptized into Christ should clothe ourselves with His love for one another.