



The First Sunday after the Epiphany
The Baptism of the Lord (A)
January 9, 2011
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+O God, open our minds and hearts so that we may know you, our joy and our Redeemer. Amen.

This past week, we received a letter at our house from an old friend in New York. We got news that our friend Dan's wife had recently died. We were shocked. It is Dan who has had cancer for so many years and through the miracle of medicine continues to life on. His wife, Arlene was like the energizer bunny, bright, peppy, a consummate dresser, always proper, somehow above it all. Who would have ever thought that she would precede Dan in death? What a surprise!

Life is full of surprises, some are wonderful and others are not. Arlene's death was certainly a surprise, and it was deeply sad. In reflecting on her life, however, she lived it to the full, rolled with the punches, somehow managed to stay focused and full of life. Nothing seemed to get her down. She had an element of 'surprise' in her personality and a wry wit and smile there were her hallmarks.

In reflecting on today's Gospel, I was surprised at how the scriptures over the past weeks have brought John the Baptist into more focus for me than ever before. We know little about him but the Gospel tells us some things, and we try to read between the lines to discover other things.

Perhaps, John was really surprised to see Jesus coming along the path, standing in line with others, taking his place to be baptized by John right there with others. Did his eyes light up with excitement? Was he pleasantly surprised and filled with joy or was he really more confused than anything else? Like so many times in life, events can be confusing, can take us aback, can give us pause and require us to re-focus our attention on what is truly important.

John and Jesus encountered one another at the River Jordan in an act that was mutual. The scripture says, "Let it be so now; for it is proper *for us* in this way to fulfill all righteousness" (3:15). They were there together to accomplish an action that would create a bridge, a bridge between the old and the new, a bridge between them that not only linked them together but that inaugurated Jesus' public life.

Imagine John having to say "yes" to that action. John said, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' Out of some kind of divinely inspired humility, John said "yes" to baptize Jesus. John put aside his own sensibility in order to participate in that baptism. Jesus put aside his own understanding of who he was in order to be baptized like all the others. Such was the nature of Jesus who could somehow balance his own authority with his own humility.

John demonstrated humility in agreeing to baptize Jesus. Jesus demonstrated humility in asking John to baptize him. So, perhaps we're called today to look at humility and what it means to be humble people before God and one another.

It seems to me that it is in moments of humility that we are more capable of being receptive to change. Think about it. Is not the manger at Christmas about humility, a simple stable, cows, sheep, shepherds, wise men and at the center, a tiny baby?

Think about our own lives and times when we are open enough and humble enough to be molded and shaped by experiences in life, some profoundly good and wonderful and others perhaps difficult and painful. No matter what, the experiences of life mold and shape us if we allow them, if we step back, reflect and allow ourselves to embrace what the Spirit might be 'up to' in our lives.

I truly believe that God speaks to us through experiences and people in life. God spoke to John and clearly spoke to Jesus in the Jordan. John's life was forever changed. Jesus' life was forever changed. Our lives are forever changed when we allow God to mold and shape us into all we can be in life.

We gather here on Sundays because we long to be molded and shaped into the image of God, not the physical image of God but the spiritual image or soul of God, if you will. Imagine that! Imagine being molded and shaped into the soul of God. We already know that God lives in and through us as individuals and as a community of faith. We already know that God works in and through us and nourishes us in Word and Eucharist, food for thought, food for the soul, food for the journey of life.

I often have a difficult time 'getting out of the way' so that God can 'get in my way,' so that God can enter and fill me with what I need to be a better person, to be more kind, more understanding, more receptive to God's grace and actions in my life. What about you? What might we need to consider in 2011 so that we can 'get out of the way' and God can 'get in our way,' so that God can enter and fill us with divine grace, a grace that can transform us in mysterious and wonderful ways?

For me, there's great comfort in knowing that we're all in this together. We're often preoccupied with this or that and seemingly too busy to let God in. God longs to be at work in and through us. Perhaps, this year will be the year for that to happen in ways like never before. Perhaps, this year we will find ourselves wonderfully surprised at what God is doing in and through us. Amen!