



Some reflections inspired by online copyrighted commentaries and homilies

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Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

Today's gospel calls our attention to Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. All four of the gospels agree that Jesus' ministry begins with an event at the Jordan. In this event Jesus knows and claims his status as God's beloved son. In this moment Jesus knows without a doubt that God is with him. This is what you and I want in our lives. We want to know that God loves us. We want to know that we are not alone. But how do we open ourselves to the truth of God? Where do we look to find the assurance of God's presence with us?

The gospel today offers us two images to reflect upon. The first is the image of the Holy Spirit. The text says, "The spirit, like a dove, descended on Jesus." The dove is the most commonly referred symbol of the Holy Spirit. The dove is a sign of peace, of comfort, and God's presence. In our relationship with God, we pray for his presence in our lives. We want to know that God is with us always, a that God that is compassionate, and that God is caring for us in our needs.

But the second image in the gospel is a very different one. The text says that "Jesus looked up and saw the heavens being torn open." This second image in the gospel is "The Heavens." The gospel makes clear that at Jesus' baptism the sky above him was earth-shattering. Therefore, if the dove is a sign of Gods' peace, then the heavens are a sign of Gods strength. The dove is all about peace and comfort, the heavens are about God, his awesome and overpowering presence. The voice of God, confirming his covenant with his Son and his people.

The power of today's gospel is that it takes these two very different images and unite them. This revelation tells us that God's comforting presence, the dove, is not limited just to tranquil situations. It also appears in the midst of disorder and unrest, and we should expect the spirit of God to be present as well. When there is trouble in our lives, when our children or our parents disappoint us, when our health fails, when people we trust turn away from us, we should not conclude that God has forgotten about us. Instead, we should expect that God will find a way to reach us even in the midst of pain and struggles.

When there is trouble in our world like the Global Pandemic, terrorists war in the Middle East, racism in America, injustice and inequality, we should not conclude that God is absent from lives. Instead, we should look for signs of the Holy Spirit, signs of hope and love, an image of care, for one another as Christians, a symbol of peace, that people can be brought together rather than be kept apart.

God's comforting presence is not limited only in happy situations. God knows that we need help and support in all circumstances. Therefore, when our life failures turn out bad, we must trust that God will find a way to comfort us. We are, after all, God's beloved daughters and sons. Therefore, when the thunder roars and the heavens are ripped apart, it is then that we should watch for the Holy Spirit to come, descending through the turmoil like a dove bringing comfort and peace to his children. So, he may be pleased with us, as with Jesus.