

Day 134 (Thursday, July 30)

The most important synthesis of our faith is the CREED. I just finished a light refresher course on the creed and would like to move to the Sacraments. This is timely as I have two baptisms in Albertville this Sunday, one of a young lady who graduated when I was in Carrot River. I was also reading the PA Herald this morning and noticed a few graduates from Melfort that I Baptized when I was there. Talk about feeling old.

For these reasons I will be giving a short teaching on baptism. Hopefully by thinking about water we can stay cool.

PS Be sure to read to the end as there is a great joke at the end

A lifelong journey

Baptism is a serious step—a step we spend much time getting ready for. We get new clothes, we get a candle to light the way, water to help us grow, oil for strength, even companions for the journey. But that is only the beginning of a much longer journey, a lifetime journey of commitment and discipleship. Our journey begins with an invitation, a call from God through the Christian community to live the gospel as committed disciples of Christ. When we accept the invitation, that call and response are ritualized and made visual and “real” for us in the celebration of Baptism.

In the Church of the first three centuries adult Baptism was the norm. Those who were interested in Christianity were invited to join the Christian community on a journey of faith. Those who accepted the invitation became candidates for the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist). The candidates were called catechumens and entered into a step-by-step process toward full membership in the Church. This process was called the catechumenate. Joining the Church in the early centuries was no easy matter. The baptismal commitment was not to be taken lightly. The entire Church would pray for and with the catechumens, instructing them in gospel values, sharing with them the faith life of the Church and celebrating the stages of their faith journey with special rituals of welcoming and belonging. A person’s coming to faith—or conversion to Christianity—was looked upon as a community responsibility.

The final Lent before the initiation was a special time for catechumens. It was like a 40-day retreat including prayer, fasting and other forms of self-scrutiny as they prepared to accept the faith and be received in the Church. Lent started out as the Church’s official preparation for Baptism which was celebrated only once a year at the Easter Vigil. That is why the Scripture readings for the liturgies of Lent and Easter are so heavily filled with baptismal allusions.

Unfortunately, this beautiful, community-supported journey to faith was short-lived. With the conversion of the Emperor Constantine in 313, joining the Christian Church became fashionable, the thing to do. The standards of the catechumenate were relaxed, and people were simply baptized on request.

By the beginning of the fifth century, the catechumenate process itself had virtually disappeared. The sacraments of initiation became three separate sacraments celebrated at separate times. Soon adult Baptisms declined, infant Baptism became the norm and the process and theology of Christian initiation of adults as practiced in the early Church became a lost art.

In some instances, infant Baptism became a routine ritual bordering on magic. It is our firm Catholic belief that the Sacrament of Baptism expresses the wonderful gift of God by which we are “made holy,” become “children of God” and “temples of the Holy Spirit.” We must take care, however, not to restrict God’s gift to one single moment (the pouring of water) or overlook that part of the sacrament that is our lifelong response to God’s gift.

Joke of the day

A man was stopped by a game-warden just as he was leaving a lake that is well known for its fishing. The game warden asked the man, “Do you have a license to catch those fish?” The man replied to the game warden, “No, sir. These are my pet fish.” “Pet fish?!” the warden replied.

“Yes, sir. Every night I take these here fish down to the lake and let them swim around for a while. I whistle and they jump back into their buckets, and I take them home.”

“That’s a bunch of crap! Fish can’t do that!” replied the warden in disbelief.

The man looked at the game warden for a moment and then said, “Here, I’ll show you. It really works.”

“O.K. I’ve GOT to see this!” The game warden was curious.

The man poured the fish into the river and stood and waited...

After several minutes, the game warden turned to the man and said, “Well?”

“Well, what?” the man responded.

“When are you going to call them back?” the game warden prompted.

“Call who back?” the man asked.

“The FISH,” the warden said sternly.

“What fish?” the man asked.

In the light of eternity, we’re here for a very short time, really. We’re here for one thing, ultimately: to learn how to love, because God is love. - James Finley

Sincerely,
Fr. Jim Kaptein