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Sunday, January 11, 2015

The Power of Baptism

This Sunday's Scripture Readings

Baptism of the Lord

<http://new.usccb.org/bible/readings/011115.cfm>

Isaiah 55:1-11 or 42:1-4, 6-7

1 John 5:1-9 or Acts 10:34-38

Mark 1:7-11



Baptism is powerful stuff! The act of pouring water or submerging someone in water and saying a few words, given to the early Christian community by Jesus, seems non-threatening at face value. But the implications of such an action can send ripples of disruption through the life of the one baptized, as well as those around him or her.

Did you hear about the atheists who went ballistic when [a few Alabama high school football players were baptized on the football field](#)? It happened one day after practice. I am not sure the setting was the best decision, but I guess water and words can seem pretty offensive to some, no matter where it happens.

Some churches have apparently realized the power in these actions to the point that they have staged spontaneous baptisms during their services. [Elevation Church in Charlotte has been accused of doing just that](#). Of course, a supposed *guide* instructs those involved to keep the baptisms to thirty to forty-five seconds, in order to keep the service flowing. Baptism is very powerful, but apparently can get very boring if it takes too long.

The power of baptism can still be seen in popular culture also. Have you seen how many celebrities still get their babies baptized? If [Celine Dion](#) and [Fergie](#) still seek out this sacrament for their children, it must be powerful stuff. Even the [royal families of the world](#), with all their power and money, seek assistance from a higher power for their little ones.

But alas, churches everywhere are sparsely populated on Sundays, and a growing secularism is engulfing many modern societies. Parents often bring their children for baptism, and then leave for seven years until it is time for first Communion preparation. This is not cynicism. It is fact.

Either the actions and words of baptism are not really that powerful or something is wrong. As people baptized into the body of Christ, we know that there is real power in the sacrament. Somehow, by our actions and words after baptism, we have allowed that power to be diminished. The power of baptism to radically change the world has been compromised.

When Jesus came to John to be baptized, he accepted a commission, one that would lead to his death on a cross. After his baptism, he went into the desert to prepare for the living out of this commission, and to be tempted and tested. It was the baptism that served as a sign of new beginning. It also was the preparation needed to survive in the desert. The people at the baptism witnessed Jesus' direct purposeful experience with the entire Trinity. That experience provided what was needed for the next steps.

When we were baptized, we were also commissioned. We also then journey in a desert where life is not always easy, and we are tempted at every turn. But if we allow ourselves to suffer a type of *sacramental amnesia*, we forget that we have received anything at all. We enter into the world without the power that is our birthright as adopted sons and daughters of God.

The good news is the power of baptism is always there for us to reclaim. We must never fall into a trap of believing perhaps what happened as an infant does not have a bearing on our lives as adults. When baptized individuals come to the Catholic Church from other denominations, they are never re-baptized. They are assisted in reclaiming that power that was always there. When Catholics who have journeyed away from the church return, it is the power of the baptism received years ago that worked to bring them back.

When we reclaim that power, and we again accept and take seriously our commission, we become an instrument of God that can literally change the world.

What Jesus received from John, Jesus transformed into a direct purposeful experience with him. This new baptism brings about new creations. That which is broken is now repaired, and a world that is broken has the opportunity to begin again.

What are those atheists on that football field so afraid of anyway? Do they think those players will really be different after some simple words and actions? Will those players then feel they have received a commission to go into the world and make a radical difference? I hope so.

Tracy Earl Welliver, MTS

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, help me to spread your fragrance everywhere I go;
flood my soul with your spirit and life;
penetrate and possess my whole being so completely
that all my life may be only a radiance of yours;
shine through me and be so in me

that everyone with whom I come into contact
may feel your presence within me.
Let them look up and see no longer me—but only Jesus.
Amen.

—*Prayer for Christlikeness, John Henry Cardinal Newman*

NOTICES

SOLIDARITY FUND FOR THE CHURCH IN AFRICA

The Solidarity Fund for the Church in Africa, which has no set national date, gives much needed aid to the Church in Africa while expressing the gratitude of the Church in the United States for the warm and generous assistance of the African priests and sisters in our parishes. The USCCB has resources available for this national collection on its website at <http://www.usccb.org/catholic-giving/opportunities-for-giving/solidarity-fund-for-africa/collection/index.cfm>.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

Catholic Schools Week is celebrated in the United States from January 25–31. Many parish communities hold special events in honor of Catholic Schools. For more information and for resources and ideas, visit: <http://www.ncea.org/our-services/catholic-schools-week>.

COLLECTION FOR THE CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA

Many dioceses will take up the collection for the Church in Latin America the weekend of January 24–25. More information and collection resources are available at: <http://usccb.org/catholic-giving/opportunities-for-giving/latin-america/collection/index.cfm>.

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