

Sunday, 13 January 2008
Baptism of the Lord
Vocation Awareness Week

As I talk about vocations this week there are two main things I want to accomplish. I want to be realistic, and I want to be challenging. So to do that I want to start off by talking about the fear of commitment. There seems to be a major problem with people being afraid of sacrifice. People are afraid of things that are difficult.

We see this in society as a whole, and I think we also see this in regards to some specific struggles within the church.

One of the areas where we see this within society as a whole is when it comes to marriage and kids. There are all sorts of disclaimers I need to throw out there at this point. There is no rule that everyone has to get married the day after they graduate from college. Plenty of people legitimately get married later in life for a number of reasons. There is no hard and fast rule that if someone doesn't get married until they're 28 or 35 or 40, or whatever, that they're doing so because they're afraid of responsibility. But when we look at society as a whole it's clear that plenty of people are delaying marriage for selfish reasons. People have unrealistic expectations when it comes to careers, success, possessions, and money and they're not willing to let something like family get in the way of this.

In society we also see the fear of responsibility when it comes to the military. In the setting of a homily I'm not going to do anything like offer my opinions on what should and shouldn't be going on in Iraq, but when it comes to the subject of commitment and challenge I do feel that I can say something about the military.

But first the disclaimers.

I don't think there should be a draft.

I don't think everyone needs to serve in the military.

I realize that some Catholics do not feel that they could in good conscience serve in the military. I respectfully disagree with this position, but I do respect those who hold it.

So the disclaimers are out of the way, here's the observation I want to make. I have met plenty of people, and I know there's more out there, who feel that there is a need to fight terrorism, who respect the military, and who seem to sincerely want to support the troops; but it never seems to have occurred to them that this could mean that they or their family members should serve in the military. They support a cause, but it's for others to fight, they're not willing to be personally involved in it.

So, by way of illustration, I've pointed out some of the problems within society as a whole.

You can probably guess what I'm going to talk about when it comes to the church itself.

Let's start by talking about nuns and sisters. Let's start by focusing on women's religious life.

For the overwhelming majority of Catholic girls and women this isn't even a blip on the radar screen. The possibility hasn't even occurred to them. It's also safe to say that the overwhelming majority of Catholic parents have probably never even thought about encouraging their daughters to be nuns.

It's as if an entire dimension of the life of the church doesn't even exist.

We're doing a slightly better job as a church when it comes to the priesthood. It's talked about more often. In general the efforts to encourage boys and men to consider the seminary aren't quite as inadequate as the efforts that are being made to encourage women's religious vocations.

But things have to change, we have to do better.

People are afraid of these things because they want to have easy lives, and they want their children to have easy lives...

...but here's the thing...

...you can have an easy life...

...or you can have a good life...

...but you can't have both.

And if we want to have a good life...

...we have to...

...we have to let God...

...and I'm going to have come up with some real disclaimers after I say this...

...we have to let God kill us.

I like to say outrageous things sometimes, but that's going a little bit far even for me, so I better back that statement up.

Today we celebrate the feast of the baptism of the Lord.

What does baptism do for us?

What does baptism do to us?

It kills us.

In his letter to the Romans St. Paul asked his readers:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Romans 6:3)

So baptism kills us.

But in the next verse St. Paul went on to say "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death...

...so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4).

So the same thing that kills us, baptism, is the very thing that gives us real life.

And the entire Christian life follows this same pattern.

That which kills us is what gives us real life.

So if something is challenging, if something demands sacrifice, and then it gives us joy...

...then there's a pretty good chance that is something that can be part of an authentically lived Christian life.

If something is easy, then sure it might provide some superficial pleasures, but it's not really worthwhile.

Chasing after possessions, sleeping around, getting drunk...

...all things that sadly so many people, that so many people I know, have been fooled into believing are signs of real success.

...obviously there's a certain attraction all of these things have, but that's not a good life.

That's a wasted life.

That's a pathetic life.

The only way anyone is ever going to have a truly good life is to embrace the sacrifices and challenges that God calls us to.

Whether that's being a father to your children, or a father to your parish...

...whether it's spending most of your life being called mom or spending most of your life being called sister.

Making the pursuit of earthly pleasure the focus of a life is a pathetic and empty way to live.

Pursuing the life of sacrifice that God calls us to, as we follow the banner of the cross of Jesus Christ...

...is what will give us a joy, and a peace, and true pleasures that are beyond anything else we could ever hope for.