

Homily at Mass Baptism of the Lord Year C – 13 January 2019

The Christmas crib has been packed away. And its probably the same at home – the tree has been put away along with its decorations; perhaps you've seen a few Christmas trees on the footpath. Our celebration of the Christmas Season comes to an end today as we see Christ baptised in the river Jordan by his cousin John the Baptist. At Christmas the son of God is born son of Mary, and revealed to poor shepherds – to the Jewish people who long for a Messiah. Last Sunday – the feast of the Epiphany – the desire of the nations is revealed to kings, magi, wise men – not Jews but to the whole world, to all nations, races and peoples represented by all of us present in our churches each Sunday. And today the revelation of the son of God couldn't be clearer – you and I hear the voice of God the Father in the Gospel today: “You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you”.

Our Lord's baptism – described in each of the 4 Gospels – is a key moment for Jesus; and marks the commencement of his public ministry – his preaching, his miracles, his encounters with the sick, the young and old, grieving widows, small children, desperate parents, men and women who need a shepherd, a friend, a saviour. As our Lord's Baptism bounces the ball on his saving ministry, it also points to the Cross and his Resurrection. Along with Christmas, the days of Holy Week and the glory of Easter Sunday are great feasts for all faithful Christians.

As we celebrate our Lord's baptism today we also want to reflect and think about our own baptism. What does it mean to be baptised? Or perhaps a more searching question is one I heard asked a few years ago: what does it mean to be created?

So much of what we eat and drink, the clothes we wear, our computers and mobile phones – all of these things are manufactured and mass produced. They all look the same, feel the same, operate and function in the same way. When we find something “handmade” or “homemade” our ears prick up, we appreciate and value the skill, the ingenuity, the imagination, effort and time that has gone into this item of clothing or piece of jewellery, or perhaps a handmade Christmas or birthday card, or delicious cake or chocolate.

To be created is we could say to be “handmade”. You and I – each one of us – is unique, individual; we have a name, a personal history and background; as the years pass we develop our own personality and set of values, others know us for our particular skills, our kindness, our friendship, our way with words, or our gift of organisation, our reliability, our thoughtfulness, our work ethic, our sense of humour. Hopefully for each of us the gift of faith, our confidence in prayer, our joy as Catholics and faithful Christians shines out too. This is what it means to be created: none of us is run of the mill, or more of the same, or a carbon copy – we're not manufactured, we are “handmade”- created by the hands of a loving creative Father who knows each of us not by barcode but by name.

Let's think about Baptism. Nearly all of us received this sacrament before we could speak or ask for this gift. Mum and Dad made this choice for us, promising that they would then bring us up in the faith in the best school of all – our family. They chose our name for us – perhaps we were named for a saint, or after a grandparent, or perhaps a name that was popular at the time. The Gregorys of this were all born around 1960. The Catechism for young people YOUCAT tells us that there are no better examples than the saints and no better helpers. If my namesake is a saint, YOUCAT says, I have a friend with God. For this reason we also encourage our children to choose a new saint – friend at the time of Confirmation.

The Acts of the Apostles tells us that St Peter baptised whole households – parents and grandparents, slaves, as well as children and babies. The Church's practice of baptising newborn children is very ancient. Parents do well to present their children for baptism in the weeks after birth. More than anything else God wants all his children to share in his life and to be part of his holy people the Church.

Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict as well as Pope Francis continue to call all the faithful to grow in holiness, to aim to be a saint, to live our baptism. Today at Mass we'll renew the promises of Baptism: We reject Satan – we want him to have no part in our lives. Satan is real: temptation is real: sin is real. God is real: his grace is real: faith, joy, hope – all these things are real – we know it by our experience. Today let's raise the roof of St Anthony's as we confidently, boldly, boisterously shout aloud our personal 'I do' -

Do you, God's precious and unique handwork believe in a Father – God, a gracious Saviour, a loving Holy Spirit, a great family that is the Church? I do!