



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER
ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH
CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

BAPTISM OF THE LORD
January 11th, 2015

Introduction to the Word:

Last week, we began by looking at God's wish for us. This reflection leads us as we begin this New Year - and celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord- to consider a habit which many in our world, religious and no so religious, undertaking – the making of “New Year’s Resolutions.” These resolutions are often based on a need, a desire, a wish, a hope for our life. To be thinner, richer, smarter, more successful – or all of those. Regretfully, many of us claim “failure” at our resolution within days or weeks of making it, and at times, can not even recall what our resolution was.

It is true, as the Wiseman taught during their transformation from “seekers”, to an individual who had discovered God's wish for them which gave them happiness. How can we pursue God's Happiness for us and what does a faith based “Pursuit of Happiness” look like? Over the next few weeks we will discern this together in a series called “Pursuit of Happiness.”

Warm-up Activity (about 8-10 minutes):

In the Gospel of today we are going to hear it said “This is my beloved in whom I am well pleased”. What does that mean to you? What does it mean for you?

Last week we focused on the phrase “YOU BEFORE ME.” How did you try and live those this past week? Do you think they are connected to being a beloved child of God? How?

Before moving forward, share a memory of a Baptism you were a part of. Maybe your own, a child's, a grandchild's, a friends or even one you witnessed during Mass at our parish. What do you remember most about it? Did it evoke any feelings on your part?

Let us pray together our Heart to Home Prayer:

*God Our Heavenly Father, we long to make our thoughts your thoughts,
and our ways your ways. As we prepare with attentive mind and open heart
to hear your Word Lord, we long to be empowered with your Spirit
so that we may bring your Word to our families, our parish and our communities.
This, our prayer, we make through the intercession of Our Lady of the Visitation and in
name of Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*



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SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

(Please selected one person – not including the leader – to take a turn at reading the scripture passages below. Remember this is often how God’s Spirit becomes present, and the gifts of the Spirit are experienced as empowering and life-giving.)

FIRST READING (Isaiah 55:1-11)

Thus says the Lord: “Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. “See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

“Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked person forsake their way, and the unrighteous person their thoughts; let that person return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the one who eats, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (1 John 5:1-9)

Beloved: Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

truth. There are three that testify: the spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree. If we receive human testimony, the testimony of God is greater; for this is the testimony of God that he has testified to his Son.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Mark 1:7-11)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In his preaching he proclaimed, *“The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”*

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan River. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from Heaven, *“You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”*

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

(Allow a few minutes for quiet and for a brief reflection on a meaningful word or thought)

COMMENTARY:

The Christmas season officially comes to an end today with Jesus’ baptism by John. The Christmas trinkets have been packed away as we position ourselves for a new year. But the Messiah remains. The adult Jesus begins His journey in the direction of Jerusalem to do the Father’s will. The good news as spoken by the angels has not been forgotten, while the wondrous mystery of Jesus’ story is still unfolding. Today the same Spirit that anointed Jesus for His mission empowers all of us, Baptized in that same Spirit, to take up our own mission.

That mission in the New Year is, in effect, a continuation of Jesus own: to seek and find the lost; to attend to the sick and the aged; to rebuild relationships in our families and among nations; and in time, to bring God’s justice and peace to all people everywhere.

In the Gospel of today we hear an important voice from heaven breath something into creation which is life impacting. The Gospel writer says “a voice from heaven was heard saying *““You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”.*” As Jesus began His ministry - His New Year - God is saying that faithfulness for Christ will be determined by only one factor – His fidelity to being a beloved Child of God!



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

Our Happiness - Success - can not be a thing, a disposable item. Happiness can not be simple a goal that is set (having a certain number in my bank or a certain number of friends on Facebook or followers on Twitter). Happiness can not be an action (doing this thing will bring me happiness. When the action is done - the happiness is gone). Happiness can not be a human relationship - my spouse or best friend is not making me happy - time to look elsewhere - literally or digitally. Its not about us - **HAPPINESS IS SOMETHING RECEIVED NOT ACHIEVED**

The encounter on the banks of the River Jordan declared Christ's ministry, but it also declared our source of happiness – being an authentic child of God who seek to hear His voice. Do you know what God's voice sounds like? Would you like to Learn what He sounds like in your life? Do you know that His voice is key to Happiness?

Happiness is a virtue settled on giving more than receiving. Happiness is a virtue that enduces a change not of actions but perspective As C.S. Lewis once said; “We can't get second things by making them first”. The pursuit of Happiness begins with the Pursuit of God – that must be first.

HAPPINESS IS A HORRIBLE GOAL BUT A WONDERFUL GIFT OFFERED TO US BY GOD. There is a terrible battle in this world that says that Happiness is the goal; that if we earn the respect of people - we will be happy, that if we obtain a standard of living - we will be happy, that if we have enough power, get all the possession, live with prestige - we will be happy. Yet God gives life, God gives happiness, God gives eternal success - its not a goal it's a gift - and this is why we are His beloved Children!

The pursuit of Happiness begins with the Pursuit of God because **HAPPINESS IS SOMETHING RECEIVED NOT ACHIEVED**

*(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)*

Questions for Reflection and Discussion: (15-20 minutes)

1. “Rising from the waters of the Baptismal font, every Christian hears again the voice that was once heard on the banks of the Jordan River: ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” Pope John Paul II, “Christifideles Laici” (Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation of the Laity).

As you reflect upon your role as a child of God in the world – how does this contribute to your level of happiness?



SMALL GROUP NEWSLETTER ST. MARY OF THE VISITATION PARISH CAMBRIDGE, (H) ONT.

2. "... [s]ince Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity. To ask catechumens: 'Do you wish to receive Baptism?' means at the same time to ask them: 'Do you wish to become holy?' It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5:48)." *Pope John Paul II, "Novo Millennio Ineunte"*

So often we think all our goals are about us – what we do. How we accomplish things. Speak of ways of hearing the voice of God more in one's life so that the goal can be the pursuit of God, which brings holiness, which leads to happiness.

3. Pope Francis recently wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open.....This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself 'the door:' baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak."

Our parish is called to be "a family of faith with something for everyone". How can we welcome more into our midst and how can you invest and invite others to join our parish family?

Closing Prayer (15-20 minutes)

(This time is reserved for quiet prayer as well as for an action-response to the communal reflections. The intent is to "outreach" to the larger community.)

GROUP PRAYER COMMITMENT: / GROUP ACTION:

1. Our parish is committed to certain Core Values: ***Eucharistic Spirituality, Hospitality and Welcome, Evangelization, Faithfulness to Who God Made Us to Be.*** Select one each and discuss as a group what you think it means and how it contributes to the Pursuit of God which is the Pursuit of Happiness? *How do they help us receive, not achieve, happiness.*

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God's favours on us today, we pray that all those under our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray united as one, OUR FATHER ...