

Church of the Sacred Heart

Oxford, Pennsylvania

January 10, 2021 – Fr. Victor Eschbach Homily

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I would like to start our reflection this evening (morning) by telling you the story of a young boy I'll call Jimmy. He was only 6 years old and in the first grade. His family lived beyond the school bus zone so his father would drive him to school each morning and then return to pick him up at the end of the school day. He understood that he was to wait for his father to come.

And so he did—faithfully--every day. But, on one occasion, because his father got caught up working late, he lost track of the time and didn't show up to retrieve his son. So the boy simply sat on the front steps of the school building and waited. 3:00 o'clock gave way to 3:30, then to 4:00, 4:30, and then at 5:00, the principal came out, locked the door, and then encountered the boy on the front steps.

Sitting down next to him, she gently asked, "Do you go to school here?" "Sure," said the boy, "I go here every day." Then the kindly principal asked, "Whose little boy are you? Who do you belong to? And why are you sitting here alone?" The child cheerfully answered, "My Daddy is coming to pick me up!" "Is he late," she asked. "I don't know," said Jimmy. "I don't know what time it is".

Just then a car pulled up at the curb. The father leaped from the driver's seat and ran up the steps. "Jimmy, I'm so sorry," said the father as he scooped the little boy up in his arms. "I got busy and forgot to come get you today."

The Principal looked uncertainly at the boy, whose smile told her this was indeed his father. She looked at the father, flashed a glance of disapproval, and quickly walked away.

The boy's father asked his son, "Didn't you worry when I didn't come right away?" "Oh no," Jimmy said with a big smile. "You said you would come. I knew you would. And now here you are."

The Dad felt a lump in his throat and tears welled in his eyes. He carried his son to the car and deposited him safely for the ride home. As they rode along, Jimmy turned to his father and said, "That nice lady asked me, 'Who do you belong to?' Didn't she know I belong to you?"

This story illustrates a great truth. When we know to whom we belong, and we trust implicitly that it is indeed true, it makes all the difference in the world. Because, you see, when we know whose we are, then we can discern who we are.

This is the meaning of Baptism. It began in the Jordan River with the ministry of the one whom we call John the Baptist.

While Matthew and Luke begin their Gospels telling of the genealogy and the birth of Jesus, and in his Gospel John tells of this Baptism event from the point of view of John the Baptist, Mark alone relates to us how the Baptism of Jesus took place. While the other Gospels put the emphasis on the human origins of Jesus. Mark wants us to appreciate his divine origin. So, he writes, "It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. On coming up out of the water he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'"

In relating this Baptismal event, Mark, in effect is telling us, "Now you know who Jesus is—and whose he is."

And so it is with us. When we were baptized, we declared, or more likely, our parents and godparents declared for us, "Now we know, for certain and for all time who we are and whose we are." Knowing that and believing that, we can live and love and serve and celebrate and die safe in the arms of the God who loves us as his beloved sons and precious daughters.

Jimmy, sitting on the front steps of the school building, waited without doubt or fear for the arrival of the one who cared for him and who would not abandon him. He was able to do that because he knew who he was; and he knew that because he knew with utter certainty whose he was.

As we celebrate today the Baptism of Jesus, I am going to ask us to make our profession of faith a little differently today.

Would all the men and boys in the Church please stand if you are able and repeat after me: **BY VIRTUE OF MY BAPTISM, I AM GOD'S BELOVED SON!**

Men, please remain standing. Would all the women and girls in the Church please stand if you are able and repeat after me: **BY VIRTUE OF MY BAPTISM, I AM GOD'S PRECIOUS DAUGHTER!**

Now together, please repeat after me: **BY VIRTUE OF OUR BAPTISM, WE ARE GOD'S BELOVED AND PRECIOUS CHILDREN. WITH US GOD IS WELL PLEASED!**

Please remain standing that through this sprinkling of water, the grace of your baptism may be renewed in you.