

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Baptism of the Lord, "Life is Beautiful" Mass

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Basilica of the Assumption

Jan. 13

The feast which the Church today celebrates is the Baptism of the Lord; and the theme of today's special Mass is "Life Is Beautiful." The feast of the Lord's Baptism celebrates that moment in history when Christ, immersed in the waters of the Jordan, was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit; and the Father's voice was heard, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The theme, "Life Is Beautiful" celebrates the preciousness of every human life from the moment of conception until natural death. It celebrates the beauty and goodness of the gift of life, whether one is rich or poor, healthy or sick, famous, infamous or barely noticed.

The feast and the theme have a lot to do with each other. In fact, the Lord's Baptism confirms that life is beautiful and life is beautiful because it is not only made by God but for God. In God's eyes each life is worth saving; each life has inherent value. In turn, we who are believers in Jesus Christ must see the beauty of life not through the world's eyes but rather through the Lord's eyes.

"Some" Life Is Beautiful

The world around us might want to modify the theme of today's Mass. Instead of saying, "Life Is Beautiful" (meaning, 'all life is beautiful'), the world often is inclined to say, "some life is beautiful." The lives of the rich are beautiful. So also the lives of celebrities. The lives of the powerful and the influential. Those lives are beautiful and our lives become beautiful, or so the world says, to the extent that we imitate them and conform to their values.

Some lives the world around us considers not beautiful at all: the unborn, the frail elderly, the terminally or even chronically ill. Often they are deemed to be burdensome, not beautiful. The lives of the poor, of immigrants, and of racial

minorities are reckoned to be less attractive than those of the self-reliant and the well-established. Yes, our culture tells us some lives are beautiful; others not so much. How easily we can fall into this way of thinking ourselves. We can regard life as a mixed bag filled with winners, losers, and those in-between.

Jesus' Solidarity with Us

The very feast of the Lord's Baptism and the Word of God proclaimed on this feast tell a different story. First, there's the amazing truth we celebrate throughout the Christmas season, viz., that God's only begotten Son became one of us, assuming our common humanity. Jesus is truly the Son of God and the Son of Mary. In today's feast we find him on the banks of the Jordan River where John the Baptist was administering a baptism of repentance. There Jesus mingles among tax collectors and soldiers; with sinners and saints, with people from every station and walk of life. Jesus stands in solidarity with that mix of humanity seeking John's baptism.

This fact tells us something about how Jesus regards our humanity. Scripture will later say of Jesus that he knew what is in the human heart, so we should not imagine that the author of our humanity had illusions about the fickleness of our hearts and their capacity for evil. Yet, as he makes his way through the crowd to the Jordan to ask John for baptism, he says something revolutionary about human life. He is teaching us that in every human life lies the seed of a new beginning. At the heart of every life lies a desire for God. At the heart of every life is found an invitation from God to share his life and love. This is true of those who are among the most exalted and the most shameful. Every life, from the noblest to the basest, receives from Christ a new significance. Herein lies the hidden beauty of life, of every life.

For that reason, Isaiah cried out, "the bruised reed he shall not break and a smoldering wick he shall not quench..." that is to say, if there is any sign of good will or any spark of desire, the Savior will seek to preserve it, build upon it, and bring it to fruition. For that same reason Peter proclaims that God shows no partiality, that is to say, each and every person of whatever origin or background is called to life eternal. It is not only a life of grandeur that is beautiful in the Savior's eyes but every life is beautiful, every life is worth cherishing, every life is worth bringing to its fullest destiny, life on high with the Father. Or, as St. Paul would later write,

“[God] wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4), and again, St. Peter teaches that “[the Lord] does not wish that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Surely in God’s eyes, in the eyes of God who is the author of our humanity, life is beautiful, our life is beautiful, your life and my life is beautiful, for he ‘wills that we be saved and come to knowledge of the truth.’

Jesus Baptized for Us and for Our Salvation

This is why Jesus was plunged into the waters of the Jordan: not because he needed to be saved from sin but rather to save us from our sins; to redeem us from the disfigurement that sin inflicts upon our souls; and to clothe our humanity with the glorious mantle of immortality and divine life. In going down into the waters of the Jordan for baptism, Jesus anticipates his baptism of blood on the Cross by which we are saved. In going down into the waters, Jesus makes all water capable of imparting to us the new life of sacramental Baptism. Indeed, his baptism symbolizes the entire sacramental activity of the Church by which salvation is opened for us and we begin to share, even now, in divine life.

As the Lord comes up out of the waters of the Jordan, the Trinitarian life in which we are destined to share is revealed to us The Holy Spirit hovering over the waters fills Jesus’ humanity with the strength of God and the voice of the Father in heaven pronounces Jesus “my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Jesus was baptized so that we too might be anointed by the Holy Spirit; so that in him we too might become the beloved sons and daughters of the heavenly Father.

As we read today in the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus of Nazareth was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power. And in the power of the Holy Spirit “[Jesus] went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil...” That is to say, Jesus went about reclaiming the beauty of our humanity, snatching it from the clutches of Satan and those who otherwise would destroy it, and restoring to it the luster of God’s glorious love and goodness.

Anointed by the Holy Spirit in our Baptism, made the adopted children of the Father of Mercies and thus brother and sister to Christ our Savior – let us also go about doing good, healing the wounds inflicted on the Creator’s handiwork – and let us do

this by being passionate advocates for human life, defenders of the defenseless, voices for the voiceless, advocates for bereft – be they unborn, terminally or chronically ill, elderly and frail, the handicapped, the poor and abandoned, victims of violence, incarcerated, strangers in a new land, those unloved and forgotten.

Next week, people from all across the United States will gather for the March for Life and many of us in the Basilica and beyond will march with them. Let our message be: “life is beautiful” – every life is beautiful – and meant to be beautiful not merely for a short span of years, but eternally! May God bless us and keep us always in his love!