

Homily for the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord

There are some words we all like to hear.

I've missed you!

You're the best!

Anything I can do to help?

I understand.

I forgive you.

I want you.

I love you.

Jesus had done nothing requiring repentance or forgiveness

-- he had no need to be baptized --

but I'm sure he was delighted to hear that voice from the heavens say,

"You are my beloved: with you, I am well pleased."

Jesus was divine but he was also fully human and he longed, I'm sure,
just as we do, to know that he was loved.

Who doesn't want to hear someone tell us: I love you?

Who doesn't want to hear God say,

"You! You're my beloved... you please me..."

And if that's a bit too pious, let's put it this way.

Is there anyone here who, when passing from this life to the next,

won't want to hear a voice from the heavens say,

I've missed you!

Anything I can do to help?

I understand.

I forgive you.

I want you.

I love you.

What was revealed on the banks of the Jordan

was not only the Father's love for Jesus.

What was revealed there was God's love for each of us.

No, you and I aren't divine: we're not perfect.

We do things that don't please God.

But our failures, our sins, never keep God from loving us:

nothing we do, nothing we fail to do,

will keep God from loving us.

We know that good parents love their children

even when their children do what isn't lovable.

Would the Father of Jesus love us, his children, any less?

Even when, with sin, we spoil the divine imagine

in which each of us was created,

still we are loved because God sees in us

the face of the One who is perfect, who is always pleasing:
God sees in us the face of Jesus.

Of course, love so great
never fails to invite the beloved to respond:
to give as generously as one receives;
to serve as humbly as one is served;
to forgive as freely as one is forgiven;
to love as deeply as one is loved.

The same was true for Jesus at his baptism.
The voice from the heavens named him the beloved,
the One in whom God was well pleased
and thus began the work, the ministry of Jesus
who gave of himself until there was nothing left to give;
who served humbly those who should have served him;
who forgave freely even those who crucified him;
who loved us so deeply we can scarcely take it in.
Jesus' baptism was a manifestation of the Father's love for the Son
and for all of us daughters and sons in whom the Father sees
the face of Christ.

As we are loved, so, too are we called
to give of ourselves as Jesus gave for us;
to serve others as Jesus taught us;
to forgive as freely as Jesus forgives us;
to love as he loved - without counting the cost.
Under the Cross of mercy,
we gather at the table of sacrifice,
where we are served by the Master who calls us friends,
who names us his brothers and sisters.

Pray that in the Supper we share
we will find ourselves named as God's own
and nourished to love as we have been loved.

- *Rev. Austin H. Fleming*