

The Baptism of the Lord January 12, 2014

Contemporary spiritual writer Annie Dillard writes about those of us in churches on Sunday:

Why do people in churches seem like cheerful, brainless tourists on a packaged tour of the Absolute? Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of Power we so blandly invoke? The churches are children playing on the floor with chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear straw hats and velvet hats to church. We should be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us onto the pews. For the sleeping God may wake some day and draw us out where we can never return.

The place we gather in, this Sacred Place, is not a living room, nor a dining room; it is a place of transformation. We gather not simply as parishioners of an organized religion, but as baptized disciples, "on fire" with the Spirit that pushes us out of our comfort zones to allow Divine Mystery to have its way with us.

As Jesus walked out of the Jordan after his own baptism, the heavens parted, they were "opened" with this announcement: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

Jesus left those waters of rebirth and embraced his mission to "bring forth justice to the nations," to quote Isaiah in the first reading. We, too, entered the waters of the Jordan in our own baptism; we, too, have been filled with the very same Spirit that descended on Jesus; we, too, have a mission to live the Good News in our own lives.

God needs us to set the world on fire with his love and mercy. Our mission is to the whole world, to **all** people of all walks of life. Our mission is to spread the Gospel by living the Gospel and changing our lives so that they mirror the Presence of Christ.

The Second Vatican Council summoned the entire Church to a renewed understanding of Baptism, the sacrament that unites all followers of Jesus and gives us the power — the **power** to serve by feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, reaching out to the sick and lonely, and working to bring about a just world.

Yes, we are **all** called to holiness; we are **all** called to share in the one priesthood of Jesus Christ. And we fulfill that calling by walking together, shoulder to shoulder, planting the seeds of the Kingdom with our love...with Christ's Love.

We should all be wearing spiritual hard hats as old worlds and old, out dated structures of politics and religion must crumble. We are in the business of spiritual transformation of the world, which ultimately amounts to a subversion of our lives: our old life, our old, false self must die so that our true self rooted in Christ will grow.

The purpose of Liturgy, the reason we are baptized, is to change the world in such a way that we bring healing and compassion to a broken world; "... a bruised reed we shall not break; a smoldering wick we shall not quench."

We are about to renovate our church building, so that the power of our Baptism will be better expressed in this space. We have a mission to change ourselves and the world, a mission that begs us to roll up our sleeves and put on our hard hats.