

Grace and peace to you from God Our Father and from our very human Lord and Savior, Jesus who is the Christ. Amen.

When I was a brand new 2nd Lieutenant in the Air Force my position made me feel very awkward. As an officer I had about 25 enlisted men and women who worked for me. I had to give the commands and they had to follow. The awkward part of all this was they had all the knowledge about how to do the jobs, while I had all the authority, but knew very little about how to do their jobs. When I showed up at my first assignment at Luke Air Force Base in Phoenix Arizona, I had all of 6 weeks of training in the Personnel career field. My training consisted of sitting in a classroom where a retired officer basically read the regs to us. I heard about what the jobs were, but never actually performed any of the tasks myself. I was a pretty good book learner and graduated at the top of my class, but had zero experience actually doing the job. On the other hand, the airmen, NCOs, and Senior NCOs who worked for me had the actual experience living out the reality of all the requirements of the more than 50 Air Force Regulations that covered every aspect of our 15 different offices or what we called workcenters. These regulations governed what these airmen did on the job every day of their lives. So, I decided early on I couldn't lead this really great group of folks from behind the big steel desk in the nice office the Air Force provided. I had to be out among the people to see what they did every day and how the tasks actually were

being done. We had a saying that you could read about how to do the job in the regulations, but you had to understand the people's situations you had to do the job in the "real World." In other words, to really understand what was going on in the workcenters you had to do the work for yourself. I had to experience for myself the hardships and the work arounds they had developed in order to make the offices run as smoothly as possible. For example, I couldn't give them orders to work overtime to finish their jobs without knowing why it took longer than it was supposed to. Every time, after spending a few hours out on the floor with my folks, when I returned to my office, I discovered something I would not have known, had I not spent time out with my people. Jesus' baptism was a sort of like that. I certainly did not have to spend so much time out in the real world with my folks and God didn't have to come to earth and get himself Baptized and fully participate in the real world either. Some wondered why I did it, but I think it made me a much better officer... Lots of people, theologians and scholars likewise have wondered why Jesus submitted to a baptism for the forgiveness of sins when he was completely and utterly sinless. He didn't have to be baptized, yet he did so, even over the objections of John the Baptist.

Jesus came to earth as the Son of God so that God would understand the human predicament. Jesus was Baptized because He wanted everyone to know that He was human and to identify with sinners in order to completely understand

our human condition. God wanted to know firsthand what life was like in the real world where sin permeates every nook and cranny of creation. In today's Gospel we see Jesus' humanity in a very real way. The main point of this text for me is not how Jesus was baptized, but why. The why of his baptism is important because it shows us his humanity. It shows us Jesus does understand the human predicament of sinner and saint because He lived it. He didn't just read about it in the Bible or observe it from light years away in heaven. He became incarnate, He became real flesh and blood and lived as a human being, completely and totally as a human being, not just like a human. In His Baptism, the heavens were opened and Jesus received a blessing from God. In our baptism we're also made saints, or children of God, but at the same time we are living in the sinfulness of this world. This world has not been fully redeemed, so we are at the same time as Luther says simultaneously saint and sinner.

In our Baptism, we have become the chosen ones of God. God himself declares we are his. In Jesus' baptism, God declares to those who were there and to us through his word, in the Bible, Jesus is his son. The son of God who comes to earth to share in our humanity and then through the cross and resurrection to save humanity from sin. Our baptism begins a journey for us as we live joined to Christ and trusting him for our salvation. It's a trust played out in every circumstance of our lives. When I had to make a tough decision as a Lieutenant

my people backed my decisions because they knew I had their backs. They trusted me because I had spent a lot of time with them getting to know them and their circumstances. When we're Baptized we know we can trust God because God has spent a lifetime getting to know us and showing us how much He loves us.

It's like the little boy who was dropped off in-front of the school door by his father for kindergarten. The father told his son, "Now if I'm not right here at the curb, waiting for you in the car, when you get out of school later on this afternoon, you just sit down on the front step and wait. Don't move. Don't go anywhere. Just stay there. Do you understand?" He understood. The school day ended and the boy did exactly as he had been told. He sat down on the front step of the school building and waited. Three o'clock gave way to 3:30. Then 4:00 came, and then 5:00. At a quarter after five his father suddenly remembered his son was waiting to be picked up at school. Realizing the boy could have been kidnapped by this time, he turned the car around and raced to the school building. There his son was sitting, obediently waiting on the step. "Didn't you worry that I might not come?" his father asked, his voice shaking. The 5 year old answered, "No. You told me not to move. I knew you'd come and I was right. You did."

Baptism is about trusting Jesus, but it's about obedience too. It's about doing what may not make a bit of sense to us, but doing it because it is the faithful thing to do, the obedient thing to do. In his baptism, Jesus is demonstrating that he

is faithful and trustworthy. Our Baptism begins that journey of trust in the saving power of Jesus through the cross and resurrection. A trust and a belief that upholds us during the difficult parts of our lives. It's the trust that's needed in the most difficult times of our lives.

Not too long ago I officiated at the funeral of a young lady who passed away at the tender age of 31. She left behind a loving husband, an 11 year old child, and a 17 month old baby boy whom she loved as her own and was in the process of adopting before the cancer made other plans for her. I asked myself over and over if this was the way God intended it to be. Her life snuffed out and nothing more... I don't have any great answers to life's hardest questions, but I will tell you this, deep down in my heart, I know this isn't the end. All of us who have lost loved ones haven't stopped loving them just because they've left this world and become part of the next. I know this to be true, God hasn't stopped loving them either! What I believe about the end of life doesn't really matter. You already know life with God is eternal and all you have to do is trust with your brain what your heart already knows. Believe what your heart already knows. Trust that because of Christ, even though our life on this earth ends, our journey does not stop. It continues with Christ forever.

When we were baptized, we were joined to Christ and that started a journey for us. A journey in Christ and always with Christ. Along the way, when we

remember our baptism, we also remember the forgiveness of Christ, and we're renewed to continue on our way. Baptism happens once, but the consequences happen each and every minute of every day. Each time we ask for forgiveness, our sinful self is drown in the waters of our baptism and raised up again in the saving grace of Jesus Christ so that we may continue to walk with Him.

This act of baptism began for you perhaps a long time ago, maybe when you were just a baby. Your journey began at the Baptismal font, but it doesn't stop there. Every time we remember our Baptism and submerge ourselves in the saving act of Christ and we're made new and raised up as saints to follow Him.

Our Baptism, as lived out daily, means we're free from worry and fear of death and self-doubt about our own future. We're freed with a purpose, to reach out to those around us who need a helping hand. Our faith in the forgiveness and resurrection of Jesus Christ sets us loose in a world where we get to live not for ourselves, but for others. May you remember you are baptized every day and live as a new creature in Christ for others, free from worries about yourself and your ultimate destiny. May you have peace with God, knowing He loves you and there is nothing God wouldn't do for you, including living among us as a human being in order to demonstrate His sacrificial, saving love. May this Good News of God's love bring you to trust in God for your very life and fill you with his saving grace, Amen.