

## **Homily: Sunday 10th January 2021**

### **Baptism of the Lord**

Readings (Year B): 1st; Isaiah 55:1-11 Psalm; Isaiah 12. 2nd; 1 John 5:1-9  
Gospel; Mark 1:7-11

These days if you need to prove who you are, you need so many different forms of identification. At one time 1 or 2 pieces of paper would be enough, but now we need multiple pieces, and often photocopies are not enough, they have to be countersigned etc.

But who we are, our identity does matter.

This liturgical year B, St Mark is our principle guide to the story of Jesus. Mark's introduction, his identity of Jesus is abrupt and pared to the bone.

If you compare it to the beginnings of the other three gospels, Jesus arrival as an adult as he comes from Nazareth to be baptised is almost a disappointment. The only introduction Jesus has is from John the Baptist.

But Mark knows what he is doing. Mark's is the shortest and the earliest of the four gospels, and we know it was used by both Matthew and Luke as a source for their gospels. Mark is also the punchiest; he knows the story he is about to tell is dramatic enough, so why bother with scene-setting and peripheral details. Mark's gospel moves at a rapid pace. Throughout, events tumble out one after another at great speed.

So where is the drama in the emergence of an unknown character from a hamlet so insignificant that it was never even mentioned in the documents of the time? It almost as if it is saying he came from nowhere. Adding that he came from Galilee only made things worse. Every non-Galilean Israelite despised Galilee Why? Well regionalism obviously played its part; Galilee was right up in the north, while Jerusalem was far away in the south.

Galilee was also surrounded by paganism and had much Greek influence. It was poor and cut off from the rest of Israel by Samaria. To expect anything useful to come out of Galilee was just plain ridiculous.

At Epiphany we noted the even the wise men thought their journey would end in Jerusalem. Traditional nationalistic belief was that deliverance and

redemption could only come from the centre. Mark turns that expectation on its head: salvation would come from the periphery, from the poor underside of society; Mark even hints at this earlier when the people come from Jerusalem to the wilderness to be baptized by John. According to Mark it is Jesus' apparently insignificant origins that make what happens at his baptism so dramatic. It is above Jesus that the heavens tear open.

At that moment it is clear to everyone that something terrific is happening; they are witnessing a truly apocalyptic moment. Heaven and earth are engaged in some serious business. It is a direct answer to Isaiah's prayer, that we hear every Advent: 'Rorate coeli: Drop down you heavens; or Oh that you would tear the heavens open.....to make known your name.'

Mark tells us how Jesus saw the Spirit descend upon him as dove, and how he heard a voice saying "You are my Son, the Beloved." The effect is dramatic and places the emphasis on God's action and the voice from heaven. That is Jesus' identity, and from that moment he embraced his mission as the saviour of the world.

In Jesus' baptism we are brought into the very heart of two profound mysteries of our faith: firstly the depth of Jesus' identification with every human person, and secondly the revelation that God is Three Persons in One.

Our identity as Christians is that. However young or old, we are adopted as God's daughter or son when we are baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And from that moment God holds us firmly in his hand as a parent grasps a child on a busy road.

Our identity as his child is never in doubt. So whatever life throws at us, good or bad, and whatever other people may think of us, we are assured that he is the only one whose opinion ultimately counts.

God thinks we're important and loves us. Like Jesus our mission is to accept and be thankful for that, and bring others to know and love him too.