

Reaching Out - Baptised into Life

We begin the Ordinary Sundays of the year with the celebration of the Feast of the Lord's baptism. It is a significant and symbolic moment which we should reflect upon and use to inform ourselves of our own responsibilities as believing and practising Christians as we begin this New Year.

Firstly, our baptism tells us that we have been chosen, and by being chosen that we belong, and in belonging that we *reach out*. More than anything we reach out to God who chose us to be his witnesses. This "discipleship of witness" is the defining stamp which is our authentic vocation. It is the essential element in our Christian journey of discovery. If I sense that God has made me his choice, then the journey is an opening up of my potential and of all the possibilities which such potential evokes. It is the entry point into my life in Christ, which is now shared and experienced through his life. As we grow and mature, as we make friends and enter into new relationships, we do so fashioned and shaped by the reality of knowing God's goodness and truth as revealed to us in Christ, the foundation stone for the decisions we are asked to make.

Secondly, through baptism the Holy Spirit animates our *reaching out* to others. The Holy Spirit drives our desire to serve those around us, compelling us to take up and voice the Christian message. This challenges our society, showing it that faith in a loving and caring God made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ, is as important now as it has ever been. In a society where morality and conscience have become eroded and blurred, the words of Jesus calling for compassion and love, mercy and forgiveness for the marginalized and the downtrodden, must be heard. Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, making the stranger welcome, visiting the sick and those in prison are the tasks which we are called to undertake. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the courage to stand up and present the face of Christ to the world, showing him as one who has experienced the hunger, the nakedness, the alienation, the sickness and the captivity that our society is capable of inflicting.

Finally the fundamental expression of *reaching out* is that it is enfolded in love. In whatever direction our vocation takes us, unless we live it in love then its impact will be empty and void. The voice of the Father to the Son: *You are my Son the Beloved*, echoes through the gospel, never more poignantly than when Jesus looks steadily upon the rich man and was *filled with love for him*. Our baptism is the prime source of this love since it tells us that we are looked upon and loved as sons and daughters of the Father, and as brothers and sisters of Christ. In the heart of this love we make our homes and our families. Conformed by this love we must reciprocate its essence to all those whom we meet. This is never an easy thing to do but it is what our baptism asks of us.

As we move forward through these Ordinary Weeks of the year, and as we listen to the Gospel of Luke each Sunday and take on board its teaching, let us keep in our minds those words of the Father to the Son: *my favour rests on you*. Let us hear them with a renewed understanding that God's grace and favour is upon us too, as we seek to bring his love into every life.