**Baptism of the Lord C Lectionary Catechesis**

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| The readings this Sunday and the gospel of Luke do not so much focus on baptism as a sacrament itself, but rather the effects and results. Luke and the associated readings seem to be about purpose and mission. This is at once prophetic, filial, and creation/covenant related. Certainly grace and mercy answer our own questions and anxieties. The challenging aspects are to discover how the children of God in sacramental and ecclesial relationship witness and apply God’s mercy and grace to the world today. |

**FIRST READING: Isaiah 40, 1-5. 9-11**

The opening verses of Second Isaiah are among the most lyrical in the whole Bible. The double proclamation of “comfort” has rich alliteration and assonance in Hebrew. It is almost like a lullaby, which really comes across in the last verse of the reading. This is not comfort in any bourgeoisie sense of the word, but rather “Comfort” in the sense of the work of the prophet and prophetic community. It stands for an act of tenderness extended toward the refugee for hospitality, hope, and happiness. It is a work, not a sentiment. Reinhold Niebuhr is alleged to have said, “A prophet is someone who comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.” Here the comfortable are given their marching orders. Isaiah 40-55 was probably given at the end of the Babylonian Exile, 598-538 BC. The CCC emphasizes the consolation of the coming Messianic King and the frequent use of shepherding imagery. The contemporary north American Church is hardly consoled by a Messiah, but rather only by more material possessions. The text achieves acceptance among the poor, the refugees, the immigrants, the illegal, but is of no import among the bourgeoisie. There’s a great deal here for reflection; the evangelical mission given in baptism directs us to the Solemnity today. Catholic don’t cry out good news at the top of their voices.

**Vss. 1-3: CCC 719** God finishes speaking through the prophets, from Elijah to John the Baptist. John bears witness to the Messiah, the Christ, who is the “consolation of Israel.

**Vs. 11: CCC 754** Messianic shepherd imagery appears in the prophets along with sheepfold, sheep gate, flock, etc. Christ is the Good Shepherd, who seeks the lost and gives his life for the flock.

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| **KNOW YOUR**  **FAITH** | What is the core mission and messages of the prophets?  Why does God begin in a desert? |
| **LIVE YOUR**  **FAITH** | What is the most challenging phrase or verse in this reading to you and your life?’  Share a time when you’ve known that God has carried you in his arms, much like the footprints poem. |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | Discuss the evangelizing aspect of this passage.  What is this “glory of the Lord” that all peoples shall see together? |
| **WORSHIP** | How is the liturgy of the Word in your parish a proclamation?  How does the Eucharist manifest the power of God? |

**First Reading**

**RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 104, 1b-2. 3-4. 24-25. 27-28. 29-30**

The psalmist here praises the creator in creation; imagery from the natural world is heaped on to show God’s wisdom and love. The psalm is a mini *Laudato Si’* of Pope Francis, who observes that creation is not first for our use or pleasure, but actually to delight God. We’ve not considered this much, but ravage the face of the earth, rather than renew it. Underlying the use of natural imagery is a deep respect for the order of nature and the providential care of the creator for all. Vs. 30 of course points to Pentecost and by extension to confirmation, especially in its baptismal consequences. We yearn for God’s Spirit and a renewal of the earth.

**Psalm: CCC 288** In the Creedal section, the creation is inseparable from the covenant revelation of God; the prophets particularly use imagery from the natural world to emphasize God’s love in covenant.

**Vs. 24: CCC 295** God created in wisdom and in love in his free will for goodness

**Vs. 27: CCC 2828** Commenting on the “Give us . . . “ of the Lord’s Prayer, these words reflect our trust in God, and this relationship of trust glorifies the Father.

**Vs. 30: CCC 292, 703** The creative action of the Son and Spirit reflect the Father’s creative act; here they are called “Word” and “Wisdom” and thought of as God’s hands. “It belongs to the Holy Spirit to rule, sanctify, and animate creation . . .”

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| **KNOW YOUR**  **FAITH** | Draw the lines connecting creation and covenant explicitly.  What is Pope Francis meaning when he writes about creation’s first work is to serve and to delight the creator? |
| **LIVE YOUR**  **FAITH** | What is your relationship with the environment?  Share a story about your relationship with gardening, farming, or care of animals that leads you to praise God. |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | What does your parish, family, or community do to renew the environment?  How “green” is your parish? |
| **WORSHIP** | Sing a creation song, like “How Great Thou Art.”  How does creation and covenant connect to the Sacrament of Baptism? |

**Responsorial Psalm**

**SECOND READING: Titus 2, 11-14 and 3, 4-7**

Grace is a uniquely Christian concept, and here grace is identified with Christ. Grace and Christ come from the same Greek word as does “chrism”. Grace is the divine gift that makes us eager to respond by doing good. The key verse for a theology of Christmas seems vs. 13, “awaiting our blessed hope.” The first part of this reading is also used for the Christmas Midnight Mass. The second part of the text lends itself well to the year of mercy. Here baptism implicity and confirmation are connected in the Holy Spirit. “Not because of any righteous deeds we had done” is a good reminder for the Jansenists among us. Mercy and grace are the clear main points of the reading.

**Vs. 12: CCC 1809** Temperance is the mastery and ordering of our instincts and desires. A temperate life

enables a faithful discipleship. Grace results in temperance.

**Vs. 13: CCC 449, 1041, 1130, 1404, 2760, 2818** Firstly, Christ is acknowledged as LORD, God, which we find expressed in our earliest faith creeds. We are reminded that this verse connects the two comings of Christ. Our lives then are a kind of Advent waiting for the return of Christ, who is our hope. The Catechism also quotes from the funeral prayers to remind of Christ’s coming. The doxology added to the Our Father emphasizes “awaiting our blessed hope.” This reading expands the simple form of the Church’s prayer, “Marana tha!” or “Come, Lord Jesus.”

**Vs. 14: CCC 802** The Catechism summarizes what Christ has done in us to become his own people.

**Vs. 5: CCC 1215** Baptism is also called the regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. It not not just merely signify these but makes them happen, without which we cannot enter the reign of God.

**Vss. 6-7: CCC 1817** Commenting on the virtue of hope, the CCC teaches us that hope makes us desire heaven. We trust this hope because of our faith and trust in God, who alone has done these things for us.

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| **KNOW YOUR**  **FAITH** | What are the four cardinal virtues?  What does it mean to say that we are born again when baptized? |
| **LIVE YOUR**  **FAITH** | What do baptism and confirmation mean to you personally?  Why do we think we can do something to manipulate the will in of God in our own personal favor? |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | Many people become negative about our world and culture today. How does this passage help us to renewal ourselves in hope?  How does the mission given in baptism and confirmation look in your life? |
| **WORSHIP** | What do mercy and grace mean to you experientially?  Locate and read as your group prayer the *Veni Creator Spiritus* hymn/sequence. |

**Second Reading**

**GOSPEL: Luke 3, 15-16. 21-22 The Baptism of Jesus by John**

The central figure of this chapter is John and Baptist who points to Jesus. This chapter provides the transition from the infancy narratives to the ministry of Jesus as his full identity is revealed. Vss. 15-18 have John responding to the questions and hopes of the people about the Messiah. Vss. 19- 20 give the rationale for and the arrest of John by Herod; this is skipped in the reading. Then in two verses we have the baptism of Jesus, whose baptism comes last as a sign of fulfillment and transition to the kingdom he will preach. The scene is not the baptism itself, but rather Jesus at prayer. Prayer is the result of baptism and is always the ground for any ministry. The Spirit’s descent as a dove (perhaps the totem animal of Israel, in Hebrew = Jonah) fulfills the hopes of the whole people. The voice (clearly of the Father) announces Jesus’ relationship with God and the delight of God. In baptism, we too enter a relationship with God of spiritual rebirth and are thereafter to give God delight in us.

**Vs. 16: CCC 696** Here, fire as symbol of the Spirit’s presence is explained.

**Vs. 21: CCC 608, 2600** Christ is identified by the gospels as the lamb who takes away the sins of the world; this is a reference to the lamb of sacrifice in the Jerusalem Temple. This further alludes to the Passover Lamb. This sacrifice is a ransom for many. Luke’s gospel emphasizes the action of the Spirit at every significant moment of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus also is seen at prayer during these moments.

**Vs. 22: CCC 536** The baptism of Jesus inaugurates his public life. Not only is he born in the flesh, but he identifies with our need for washing from sin, although he himself is without sin. At his baptism heaven opens, God is heard, and the Spirit overshadows.

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| **KNOW YOUR**  **FAITH** | Share your reflections on the truth that Baptism makes us children of God.  What does sacrifice as a ransom have to do with our redemption? |
| **LIVE YOUR**  **FAITH** | How do you imagine that your life gives delight to God?  What does it mean for you to have fire in you? |
| **SHARE YOUR FAITH** | What do we do in particular that delights God?  If we are all children of God, how ought we to treat one another? And then, what about those not baptized? |
| **WORSHIP** | Do you pray before you begin any ministry or service in your parish or community?  How is fire represented in the rite of baptism? |

**Gospel**

**Next Sunday: OT 2 C: Isaiah 62, 1-5; Psalm 96; I Corinthians 12, 4-11; John 2, 1-11**