



Bringing Home the Word



The Baptism of the Lord

January 10, 2016

Facing Expectations

By Janel Esker

How is your Christmas going? Christmas may seem to be far in the past, but the Church's celebration doesn't officially end until today's feast, so it's an appropriate question.

Were your gatherings festive enough, the presents perfect enough, the Mass moving enough? Our expectations shape our experiences and how we feel about them. Did this year's Christmas live up to yours? Or did it just leave you with more clutter and bills?

In today's Gospel, St. Luke tells us

that those awaiting the Messiah were "filled with expectation." The Jewish people in Jesus' day expected a Messiah who would lead the revolt against the Roman occupying force and overturn the unjust status quo. They expected a political leader or a revolutionary, yet in today's first reading Isaiah says that God's servant would not be violent—he would bring about justice and freedom through peaceful means.

Jesus *did* overturn the status quo—not through political or military might, but through uplifting the poor, touching lepers, and reaching out to sinners and outcasts. He wasn't like anything the people expected, yet God praised him at his baptism: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

As we close the Christmas season and move into Ordinary Time, what expectations do you have about how Jesus will act in your life? Have you decided what he should stand for and what he should do for you? Or can you let Jesus be who he is? †

A Word from Pope Francis



"Jesus did not need to be baptized, but the first theologians say that, with his body, with his divinity, in baptism he blessed all the waters, so that the waters would have the power to confer baptism. And then, before ascending to Heaven, Jesus told us to go into all the world to baptize. And from that day forward up until today, this has been an uninterrupted chain: they baptized their children, and their children their own, and those children... And also today this chain continues."

—Homily on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, January 12, 2014

Sunday Readings

Isaiah 42:1–4, 6–7

"Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased."

Acts 10:34–38

"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power."

Luke 3:15–16, 21–22

"All were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah."



Father in heaven, you say to us as you said to Jesus, "You are my beloved; in you I am well pleased." May we always know your deep love for us and reflect your face to the world through our lives.

—Diane M. Houdek

Responding to Prejudice

By Jim Auer

Chances are, you've heard the voice of prejudice, even if only in literature or in some social media post. If you yourself are not a bit prejudiced, that's wonderful, but you're fairly likely to encounter someone who is. It's easier to respond when the remark comes from someone you don't know well: an acquaintance or distant classmate, a neighbor you hardly see, a stranger passing out literature or trolling the blogosphere. They're easy to confront because you have little to no relationship with them. If they get angry with you, you haven't endangered anything you hold valuable.

But what happens if it happens at home? With a close friend? In your workplace? It's a different ballgame there. You may be with a group and hear a passing remark. It won't necessarily have the overt, ugly, or bitter malice of bigotry. It may even be phrased as a joke or supposedly witty comment. You may feel ashamed, upset, even angry that someone you love, respect, and admire is tainted with an attitude you consider very wrong. Whatever the case, it leaves you feeling uncomfortable or wanting to do or say something.

You face two challenges: how to deal with your feelings and deciding how to respond to the situation. The first thing to do is to try to understand the person's background. Prejudice isn't new, and *all* prejudice has a background. We need to consider what might prompt such an attitude or remark. *This is not the same as accepting or excusing it.*



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How do you describe the might of God?
- What does your baptism empower you to do?

For instance, while less common than it used to be, some people still haven't had deep, personal experiences with people of other races, cultures, religions, abilities, or orientations. Their schools and neighborhoods may have been more homogeneous—and let's face it: we all tend to gravitate towards others like ourselves. But we all need firsthand knowledge that stereotypes of any kind simply are not (universally) true.

Fear is frequently at the heart of prejudice. The underlying question is, *What's going to happen to me and what I cherish if "they" take over and gain power?* Understanding that fear can help you deal with the person and situation more compassionately and effectively.

Now to the nitty-gritty. But first, don't expect a formula that covers every case or produces a miracle. None exists.

• *When.* It makes a big difference whether you're in a group or alone with the person. If you're one-on-one, now's the time. There's no reason to wait. Responding immediately may have the advantage of reaching beyond the individual, either in witnessing to the bystanders and/or affirming their own non-prejudice. Many can admit their mistakes later but don't do so publicly because they are embarrassed or defensive. Says Joel Ratner, director of the Ohio/Kentucky/Allegheny Regional Office of the Anti-Defamation League, "The chance to educate should never be put off completely."

• *How.* Most responses will produce some tension, but you can soften it by speaking in a calm, pleasant voice. Your tone, words, and body language can convey that this is an exchange between friends, not a hostile confrontation. Simply say, "I don't appreciate that remark," or "You're talking about some of my friends," or "I have found that not to be true." Put the focus on how the words or behavior makes you feel.

The best way to overcome prejudice is to introduce ourselves and others to good people within any group we are biased against. Even Jesus faced prejudice: "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" (John 1:46). How did the disciple Philip respond? Just as Jesus would: "Come and see."

WEEKDAY READINGS

January 11–16

Mon. First Week in Ordinary Time:
1 Samuel 1:1–8 / Mark 1:14–20
Tue. Weekday:
1 Samuel 1:9–20 / Mark 1:21–28
Wed. Weekday: 1 Samuel 3:1–10, 19–20 /
Mark 1:29–39

Thu. Weekday:
1 Samuel 4:1–11 / Mark 1:40–45
Fri. Weekday: 1 Samuel 8:4–7, 10–22a /
Mark 2:1–12
Sat. Weekday: 1 Samuel 9:1–4, 17–19;
10:1a / Mark 2:13–17