



Bringing Home the Word

Third Sunday of Advent
December 16, 2018

Preparing for the Living Water of Christ

By Mary Katharine Deeley

I love waterfalls. When I'm out hiking, I'll take any side path that leads to a waterfall. The first time I swam in a waterfall pool was memorable. I'm not sure where this love came from, but there is something about the motion and sound of the water as it's falling that soothes my mind and enlivens my soul. I also know that waterfalls can be dangerous: The force of the water can sweep everything over the edge. Still, when Jesus refers to his living water in the encounter with the woman at the well (John 4), I immediately think

of water falling into a pool and the abundant life that grows around the area.

For Christians, water signifies both life and death. At creation, God said, "Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures" (Genesis 1:20). God then used the waters of a flood to destroy wickedness on earth (while saving Noah and others). Water washes us clean and keeps us alive. On a recent trip to Israel, I had an opportunity to stand in the Jordan River and renew my own baptismal vows. I was struck by the power of the words and the coolness of the water. It also occurred to me that simply renewing my vows was not enough. Our promise, inherent in the Creed, is that we will live a life transformed by grace with the help of the Holy Spirit. That is both comforting and challenging. But Jesus, who is living water, whose Spirit brings us life and whose fire is ready to purify and make us ready, is with us now and forever. +

Sunday Readings

Zephaniah 3:14-18a

Do not fear, Zion, do not be discouraged! The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a mighty savior.

Philippians 4:4-7

The Lord is near. Have no anxiety at all, but in everything...make your requests known to God.

Luke 3:10-18

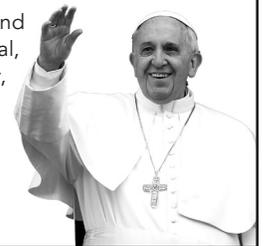
[John said,] "I am baptizing you with water...He will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire."

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motion and sound of falling
water that soothes my mind
and enlivens my soul.*

A Word from Pope Francis

Let us implore from on high the gift of commitment to the cause of peace. Peace in our homes, our families, our schools and our communities. Peace in all those places where war never seems to end. Peace for those faces which have known nothing but pain. Peace throughout this world...Simply PEACE.

Address at Ground
Zero Memorial,
New York City,
September 25,
2015



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Do I regularly attend Mass to experience Jesus' living water?
- Can I make time to celebrate baptismal anniversaries as well as family birthdays?

A New Way of Seeing

By Kathy Coffey

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).

In the northern parts of the country, winter makes the land bleak and brown. As spring makes its gradual entrance, trees and grass reach deep into their roots for nurture. Perhaps it is like that with belief. When our lives seem wintry, people of faith grip the bedrock and, from that common core, surge into new life. We reach down into roots sunk so deep in tradition we cannot see their source. But we know they are there. We count on them for life.

If we try to go it alone, we quickly discover our impoverishment. To ignore God's graciousness is to risk condemnation. To count on grace is to take our place among the great ones who went before us.

While we may amuse ourselves with fantasies of martyrdom, we all face less dramatic Calvaries. The irritating colleague, the whiny child, the boring job, the repetitive housework, the chemotherapy, or the long commute: All represent places to which Christ calls us, the arenas where belief becomes action.

Do we believe the little stuff of our life can help shape us for greatness? Or do we relegate holiness to apostles and saints,



centuries ago? Just as we can neglect belief, we may mistakenly distance the grace of baptism to our past. But we can draw on baptism's power today. Any gardener knows that deep-rooted plants need water. So too the baptismal symbols offer a fresh start, full of potential and vigor.

Sharpened Vision

When we bring that symbolism into each day, we discover that we are washed not only in water, but in a new way of seeing. On a natural plane, we can all appreciate the yearning for rain after drought or a hot shower after dirty work. Jesus referred to himself as an exuberant fountain quenching our thirst: "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink" (John 7:37).

The postbaptismal anointing is an ancient act of strengthening. In the fourth century, St. Ambrose described the attraction of fragrant oils: "We shall run following the perfume of your robes." If the perfume industry can capitalize on lovely scents, Christians can recognize more profound overtones: We are marked with the symbol of God's beauty.

We who fret over problems at 3 AM know they become less formidable in the daylight. On his deathbed, the blind writer Goethe pleaded, "More light!" Jesus addresses our dread of darkness:

"While I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5). One gift of baptism is the presentation of a burning candle with the words: "Receive the light of Christ."

Clothed in Christ

We know the difference clothing can make and how we feel when a new shirt rates a compliment. Garment imagery runs throughout Scripture, where we read: "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Galatians 3:27).

A name change in Scripture signaled a new person (Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah, Cephas to Peter). So our baptismal name gives us a new identity in Christ. We know the security of the Good Shepherd calling us by name. The Book of Revelation adds, "On him I will inscribe the name of my God" (3:12).

The gifts of baptism renew our best selves so we can get on with the business of recreating the world. Energized by shared beliefs that root us firmly, by symbols that ground our identity, we can focus on dreams and hopes, not fears and anxieties. +



Lord, you are generous and kind to all your people. Instill within me a compassionate and generous heart, so I may respond to my poor sisters and brothers near and far away.

—From *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*, Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney

WEEKDAY READINGS

December 17–22

Monday, Advent Weekday:
Gn 49:2, 8–10 / Mt 1:1–17

Tuesday, Advent Weekday:
Jer 23:5–8 / Mt 1:18–25

Wednesday, Advent Weekday:
Jgs 13:2–7, 24–25a / Lk 1:5–25

Thursday, Advent Weekday:
Is 7:10–14 / Lk 1:26–38

Friday, Advent Weekday:
Sg 2:8–14 or Zep 3:14–18a / Lk 1:39–45

Saturday, Advent Weekday:
1 Sm 1:24–28 / Lk 1:46–56