

A Pastor was baptizing some of the members of his congregation in the nearby river. A young man approached and the Pastor asked him, "Why do you want to be baptized?" The man replied, "Because I want to find Jesus." The Pastor then immersed him down into the water, pulled him up and asked, "Did you find Jesus?" He responded, "No Pastor." So, the Pastor pulled him down into the water again and raised him up asking, "Did you find Jesus?" The man said, "No pastor." Once more the Pastor immersed the young man into the water and pulled him up and asked, "Did you find Jesus?" Trying to catch his breath, the young man exclaimed, "Pastor, I don't think He down there!"

The good news is that through baptism, Jesus can be found not so much down there but in our hearts.

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Mark:

This is what John the Baptist proclaimed: "One mightier than I am coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." It happened in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John. On coming up out of the water Jesus saw the heavens being torn open and the Holy Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

I grew up in a small village in upstate New York called Fort Edward, our house was on a dead-end street, very close to the Hudson River. Just outside my back yard, there was a creek of murky water, three to four feet deep. I spent a lot of good times with my nine brothers fishing, rafting in the small inlet. During the hot summer, we would create these unsophisticated rafts and make our way out into the water. Underneath our rafts were plenty of bullheads, sun fish, carp, as well as various odds and end which drifted in from the Hudson. It never failed that at some point during our rafting exploration, we would either accidentally or voluntarily find ourselves in the murky waters, cooling off and having a good time. Of course, my mom didn't see it that way, as walked in the back door soaked from head to toe.

The water in the Jordan River wasn't much different than the cloudy water outside my back door. I know that because some years ago, while on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, we indeed spent time at the Jordan River. I wasn't surprised at the water's murkiness but I was astonished by reaction of some of the Clergyman in our group. When we arrived at the water where Jesus was baptized, some of the clergy jumped in the river and began ducking each other and saying, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The river was shallow and dark but when the clergy got out of the water they seemed so refreshed and renewed, I could see and hear their passion, their joy and their exuberance. I thought to myself, "this is what St. Paul meant when he wrote, "In baptism, we are new creations, the old order has passed away, all things are made new."

Each time we proclaim the Gospel of Jesus' baptism, it brings the story to life. It was at the Jordan River, that Jesus shows Himself as truly human, He joins others in the ritual of John's Baptism. However, once He comes up from the earthly water, He is filled with the heavenly, living water of the Holy Spirit. God then announces from Heaven, Jesus identity, as His beloved Son. Jesus' baptism celebrates that in Him, the divine and the human are mixed together.

Last year, I performed a Baptism at my former parish St. Joseph's in Greenwich. Minutes before beginning the ceremony, the father of the baby, handed me two bottles of water. The first bottle was labeled, "Water from the Jordan River and the second bottle was labeled, "Water from the Battenkill River." The father asked if I would pour the waters into the Baptismal font, to then be blessed and poured onto his child. The Father explained that Jesus immersed Himself in the Jordan and his family had immersed themselves each summer in the Battenkill. After emptying the two bottles into the baptismal font, I prayed, "Father, pour out the power of the Holy Spirit on the water in this font."

In our Gospel today, John told us that he baptizes simply with water but that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. The mixture of the two-waters, the family water and the Jesus water, reminded me of what took place at our Baptism, where earthly water is poured out on us, and God fills us with the heavenly living water of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "Let all those who are thirsty, come to me and from their innermost being shall flow rivers of living water."

Just as Jesus' identity was revealed at His baptism, at our baptism God changes who we are. The bible states that through our baptism, we are no longer strangers to God but citizens with the saints, belonging to God's household, we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set a part for God's own possession."

Most of us will not jump in the Jordan River and reenact our baptism, but each time we place our fingers into Holy Water and make the sign of the cross, we remember and we celebrate the new life we have in Christ Jesus.

This week take some time to reflect on your own baptism. Give thanks to God for your parents, godparents, grandparents or whoever helped you to swim in the river of your, baptismal water.

Let us prayer: please pray after me: Lord Jesus, John baptized with earthly water but you baptized with living water, I thirst and come to you, allow the living water of the Holy Spirit to flow through me, that I may be healed, forgiven, strengthen to be your instrument of peace. Amen and Amen.

May God bless you and keep you, may God's face shine upon you and be gracious to you, may God look kindly upon you and give you peace. May Mary our loving mother, hold you in her tender arms. Have a blessed and safe week.