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“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11).

Baptism of the Lord

Isa 42:1-4, 6-7; Ps 29 Acts 10:34-38; Mark 1:7-11 (Cycle A)

“Who am I?” is the question and organizing principle at the heart of every person’s life. Today’s Solemnity of the Baptism of the Lord is a window into how Jesus came to know who he was and the purpose of his life. Our celebration of his identity is also an acceptance of our own identity as baptized members of Christ. This is a radical and transforming grace, God’s gift, and a lifetime invitation to realize our Christian maturity.

The basic truth about baptism is that You and I are We. Baptism, according to Mary Collins, OSB, is always about relationships. To be baptized is to be welcomed into a community that begins with the community of God. Today’s Gospel scene of Jesus’ baptism at the Jordan reveals the trinitarian presence of God as Father speaks to Son as the Spirit descends on Jesus. The image and likeness of God is our family resemblance, imprinted on us and the expanding network of all created things. It is reflected in the model of parents giving life to their children, love multiplying itself in the growing web of relationships that sustain the human community.

A large multigenerational family portrait celebrates this miracle of life. Every family, whether biological or adoptive, complete or partial, reveals the pattern of expanding relationships, interdependence and natural collaboration. When God says in Genesis that it not good for someone to be alone, this expresses the intended blessing of

community for survival and a full life. One of the great lies of modern society is that living for oneself is the secret of freedom and happiness. One of the greatest causes of suffering is loneliness by choice, neglect or abandonment of anyone for lack of care. It is not supposed be this way.

Dostoevsky captured the human condition in words often quoted by Dorothy Day to explain why she founded the Catholic Worker Movement: "We have all known the long loneliness. We know that love is the answer, love in community." How many people have made the journey to this essential truth by first experiencing the long loneliness that comes from separating self from others. We cease to be human without love. We come alive in the mutual recognition of our need for some form of community, whether it is family or partnerships or circles of friendship or professional associations.

Better than any theological definition, this describes the essence and goal of baptism. Once we experience life in relationship, it is then natural to realize that this model has its origin in the mystery of some ultimate model of love, the starting point and pattern that suffuses the universe. To grasp that Jesus came to heal a broken world by renewing it with love is what we celebrate today in his Baptism and our own.

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