Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and remain upon him” (John 1:31).

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 49:3, 5-6; PS 40; 1 Cor 1:1-3; Jn 1:29-34

The readings for Christmas and into the new year return repeatedly to the theme of baptism. For many of us, this first sacrament can seem distant and unimportant, yet it was a defining moment for Jesus at the start of his public ministry, and it is how we are incorporated into his life as Christians. Our baptisms set the trajectory of our entire lives into the mystery of Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God. This is who we are, and how we live out our authentic identity is the essence of Christian formation.

The question of identity is crucial in the Gospels. Matthew and Luke include versions of the genealogy to establish that Jesus is of the line of Abraham and even all the way back to Adam. Matthew's infancy stories link Jesus to Bethlehem and the line of David. The four gospels establish the identity of John the Baptist to show that he is fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy as the messenger who prepares the way of the Lord. In today's gospel reading from John, the Baptist testifies that Jesus is no less than "the Lamb of God," preeminent in existence and stature, the one on whom God's Spirit comes to rest like a dove.

Midway through the gospels, the evangelists return to this question of identity when Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" The validity of his mission depends on who he is. Though Jesus is only a village carpenter from the hill country of Galilee, with no formal training and no link to the religious establishment, the crowds flock to him because "he speaks with authority" and reveals God with wondrous signs and powerful words.

Because our own identity as baptized into the Spirit of Jesus depends on how we express his presence, the lifelong goal of discipleship is to be like Jesus by living the Gospel. To be an evangelist in the most basic sense is to have others recognize Christ in us. This can only happen if we remain in him, listening and learning from him, imitating him. To achieve this, we must become so centered and so at peace in our union with Jesus that the "dove" of the Spirit comes to rest upon us. Regular prayer is one way we enter this kind of familiarity and learn to trust Jesus' abiding presence.

Our regular participation in the liturgy with our faith communities is how we hear his Word, then embrace his identity in the most intimate way possible in the Eucharist by consuming his body and blood. We "become what we receive," as St. Augustine so succinctly put it.

We then take him with us back into our families, our work and all our relationships. When life confronts us with its questions and doubts, we can readily testify that we are with Christ, in Christ and for Christ. He is alive in us. To be his body in the world is the essence of our faith and the joy of the Gospel.