

**“The Father’s Approval”**

*“You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11)*

For me, one of the best things about Christmas was the time I got to spend with my nephews Sam and Isaac. As many of you know, the presence of children during Christmas brings a special energy and excitement to the celebration and this was certainly true for our family, and, as we watched the boys open their gifts and enjoy their new toys, I noticed something about the way they played. As they moved from one toy to the next, they were always aware of the location of their parents and each time they began to play with the new toy, they would look up and shout above our conversation, “Dad! Mom! Watch me!” and then proceed to initiate their newest toy.

One of the most basic needs in life is the approval of our parents. In fact, the need for a parent’s approval is so strong that it can influence our lives in profound ways and guide many of life’s most important decisions. A parent’s approval can be a factor in everything from choosing a career to selecting the person you are going to marry. If you have teenagers, you may think this need disappears as kids get older, but research shows just the opposite. In fact, for most young adults, parents are the single greatest influence on a child’s behavior and values; greater than the church, greater than the media, greater, even, than his or her peers.

The blessing of a parent is one of our most fundamental emotional needs and, in today’s Gospel reading, we see the ultimate in Parental approval. In this text, Mark tells the story of Jesus’ Baptism, and as we heard in the reading, when Jesus comes up out of the Jordan River, heaven itself is “torn open,” the Spirit descends on Jesus “like a dove,” and Jesus hears the voice of His Father speaking words of approval: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11).

In these words from heaven we find some amazing things and the first is that here in Mark 1:11, God announces who Jesus is. “You are my Son.” In these words, God is making it crystal clear that Jesus is not simply a good man, a skilled teacher or even a prophet. God the Father is identifying Jesus with Himself. He is making the announcement that Jesus is God, and that He possesses all of the qualities and characteristics of the God who created the world in Genesis, who chose Abraham and called Moses, who spoke through the prophets and to whom the Psalms pointed. Here, the voice of the Father removes any doubt about who this seemingly simple carpenter from Nazareth truly is. Here, the Father identifies Jesus as God and, in this miraculous Baptism, Jesus is also anointed.

In the Old Testament, the practice of anointing was used to identify someone who would serve God in a special way. Kings were anointed. Prophets were anointed, and here, Jesus is anointed. In His Baptism, Jesus is shown to be the “Messiah” – a title which literally means, “anointed one” – a word which, in Greek, is translated Christ. Here, in waters of the Jordan River, Jesus is set apart for His specific work as our redeemer. He is singled out as “the one” through whom God would provide deliverance, through whom God would keep His promise, and this anointing is confirmed as the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus with the power He will need as begins His ministry as the bearer of sin.

Finally, as Jesus “comes up out of the water” we see an incredible statement of approval as the voice of the Father showers the Son with encouragement saying, “with you I am well-pleased.” This was the work for which the Father had sent the Son into the world, and now, as Jesus begins his public ministry, God’s plan for our salvation is in full swing. As Paul writes, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,<sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:19-20). And as God’s sovereign will for us in Christ was moving toward completion, the Father couldn’t be more pleased with His Son.

In the account of Jesus’ Baptism God announces, God anoints and God approves, and yet as incredible as these occurrences are, there is another “A” word involved in the Baptism of Jesus, and that word is “absolution”. And, for us, this is the most important and relevant truth connected to the miracle of Baptism, because Baptism is all about absolution! Whether we are talking about the miraculous and unique nature of Jesus’ Baptism, or the miracle God

has worked in our own Baptisms, Baptism is, first and foremost, all about forgiveness. Baptism means absolution, and this is huge for us because it is only through God's forgiveness that we can hear the message of God's approval.

We desperately need to hear this message, because this not our natural relationship to God. We hear this terrible truth each time someone is Baptized at this font as we are told that, "we are all conceived and born sinful" and "we would be lost forever unless delivered from sin, death, and everlasting condemnation" (LSB, 268). My friends, this is our nature! We are sinful people from the time we come into existence, and this means that we are natural-born enemies of God, we are separated from Him and, in our sin, we do not have the approval of our Holy Heavenly Father.

That is why the Baptism of Jesus is so important! This is not some trivial event in Jesus' earthly life, instead in His Baptism He *identifies with us* and He is *connected to our sin*! Jesus didn't need to be baptized for His sin. The Bible is clear that Jesus led a sinless life (Hebrews 4:15). But Jesus' Baptism was absolutely necessary, because in His Baptism, He begins to carry the crushing weight of all that we have done to separate ourselves from God. He carries our greed; He carries our anger; He carries our lack of compassion and our love of self. In Jesus' Baptism, He begins His job as the bearer of our sins. He begins the work He was born to accomplish. He begins the job as our substitute; paying for our sins with His perfect life. And He does not stop until, with His dying breath, He says from the Cross, "it is finished." The Baptism of Jesus is of the utmost importance for us...and so is our Baptism as well!

Just like with Jesus, Baptism is no trivial event in the life of a Christian; instead in the miracle of Holy Baptism, God binds us to our Savior. In Baptism, God joins us to the work Jesus did for us 2,000 years ago. In Baptism, God connects us to the Cross! That is exactly what Paul meant when he wrote in today's epistle reading, "don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death" (Romans 6:3-4). You see, in order for God to be pleased with us, our sin – sin that God cannot tolerate – had to be put to death. That is exactly what happened on the Cross. Your sins, and my sins, and the sins of all people of all time were put to death in the death of Jesus Christ, and in the waters of Baptism we are joined to that death. In our Baptism, our sin is destroyed and our lives are connected to a Savior Who has defeated death, Who rose from the grave and the result, Paul tells us, is that we also will rise to "live a new life" (Romans 6:4).

Through our Baptism, our lives have been wrapped in Christ. God's Word tells us that, "all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ" (Galatians 3:27). In Baptism we are absolved, we are forgiven, we are covered by Christ. This means that as Baptized believers, we have the promise from Scripture that when God looks at us He doesn't see our greed or our anger, or our lack of compassion or our selfishness. Baptism means that when God looks at you He sees Christ. My friends, this means that in Baptism you have the Father's approval.

Many times earthly parents base their acceptance on the ability of a child to do what is right. We reward the good and we punish the bad...but that's not how God works! God doesn't base His approval on what we have done. God's message to mankind – His Good News to us today – is that we have been accepted because of what Christ has done for us. He has carried our sin. He has taken our punishment. He has defeated death and because of what Christ has done for us, Heaven has been opened and we can live a new life of righteousness; a life under grace!

What a powerful message! In Jesus' Baptism, God speaks amazing words of approval and today because of Christ's Baptism...and life...and death...and resurrection *for you*, God says to *you*, "You are my Son (You are my daughter) whom I love; with you I am well pleased." God spoke these words at the Baptism of Jesus, He spoke these words at your Baptism and, with the same voice that brought light and life into existence He speaks these words to us today! Each time we hear God's Word, and – in faith – repent and believe, God's gift of forgiveness is freely given, heaven is opened up and we are given the power to live our lives as witnesses for Him because we have our Father's approval. Amen.

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