

Homily 2022.01.09 Baptism of the Lord (Year C)

NOTES

Traditions matter. Tradition is the way in which faith and identity is handed on from one generation to the next. Indeed, the church speaks of ‘Scripture and Tradition’. She places them side by side as the way in which the faith continues through the ages. Both are interpreted through the teaching ministry of the Church which is called the Magisterium.

Due to COVID we will soon hit two years in which a number of our traditions have been suspended. This is dangerous. Traditions cannot be deep frozen for long. Left unpractised they wither and become forgotten. And the faith they convey is weakened or lost.

Today, I highlight the interrupted tradition of having holy water in our churches. Sprinkling or dipping many fingers in the same bowl have not yet been reinstated. There are Catholic children now with no deep memory laid down of blessing themselves with Holy Water on entering and leaving the church. Adults may be losing the memory too. This is serious. There is a loss of shared action, shared story, shared memory and shared identity.

Today I invite you, in your imagination at least, to renew that tradition.

The tradition matters because it is more than just a nice pious thing to do. Blessing oneself with Holy Water on entering the church is a reminder of my Baptism. The action says: ‘I am baptised, I belong here, this is my home.’ When I bless myself with the baptismal water I am saying. ‘I belong to the royal, priestly, prophetic people of God. Since this is God’s house it is also my house. I claim the right to be here.’ It is a statement of identity – this is who I am. And on leaving the church I accept the responsibility placed on all the baptised to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to all those I will encounter.

As most of us were baptised as infants, we do not remember the event. And because of this there is a danger we do not take our baptism as seriously as we should. And therefore reminders such as the blessing or sprinkling of water are important, and their continued suspension is a serious matter.

There is no greater dignity and no greater responsibility on earth than to be baptised. We must make extra effort at this time to keep this truth front and centre of our lives. Find a way to remind yourself every day of this most wonderful truth.