

JANUARY 12, 2025 FATHER VIJAI AMIRTHARAJ

One day, Johnny's mother looked out the window and noticed Johnny playing church with their cat. He had the cat sitting down quietly and he was preaching to it. The mother smiled and went about her work. A little while later, she heard a loud meowing and hissing, and ran back to the open window to see Johnny baptizing the cat in a tub of water. She called out, "Johnny, stop that! The cat is afraid of water!" Johnny looked up at his mother and said, "Well, he should have thought about that before he joined my church."

Sisters and brothers, today's Feast of the Baptism of the Lord reminds us of two important things - of our identity and of our mission. First, it reminds us of who we are and whose we are. By baptism, we become the sons and daughters of God. By baptism, we become the brothers and sisters of Jesus. By baptism, we become the temples of the Holy Spirit. Hence, baptism is the basis of the whole of our Christian life. Secondly, the feast of the baptism of the Lord reminds us of our mission - to acknowledge our own dignity as God's children, as people created in the image and likeness of God, to appreciate the divine presence of God in other human beings by honouring them, loving them, and serving them with all humility.

In the first reading that we heard, the mission of the servant of God is outlined. The Prophet Isaiah says, "He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice. A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench." This prophecy, of course, was fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Jesus' baptism was a defining moment in his life. It marked a departure from the years of relative anonymity and the beginning of his three years of public ministry. He was commissioned to do the Father's will, and he was assured that the Father's favour would be with him all through his

ministry and all through his life. And we heard in the readings how Jesus went about doing good, doing the will of God.

Sisters and brothers, our own baptism commissions us to live as servants of God, to live in the service of God, so that our heavenly Father may say to each of us at the end of our life journey the words he said to Jesus, which we heard in the Gospel, "You are my beloved son. You are my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased." The 13th century King of France, St. Louis XI, insisted, apparently, that the grand celebration of his birthday should be held on the day of his baptism and not on his birthday proper. He argued that baptism was the beginning of a life that would continue for all eternity in God's everlasting kingdom, and therefore, that deserves to be celebrated much more than one's birthday.

We prepare for our eternal life, our life with God in heaven, through our life here on earth. And so, let us strive to be faithful to our baptismal call, to love and serve God, and to love and serve our brothers and sisters. Amen.