

## Homily for the Baptism of the Lord

Today's first reading from Isaiah says that God has told him to tell the exiled citizens of Jerusalem that their "sentence" is at an end or their exile is over, that the merciful God has forgiven them and the exiles are to return home. They will return as a grand religious procession from Babylon to Jerusalem led by their own God. To pave the way, valleys and mountains are to be levelled, and a highway created in the wilderness. The last paragraph presents a lonely sentry who never went to Babylon but waited in Jerusalem, always looking out for the return of the exiles. He finally sees the approach of the procession and he can't contain his joy. He shouts it from the highest hill, "Here comes your God with power!" The second reading, from the Letter to Titus, dwells on this theme of growth. "The grace of God has appeared, saving all and training us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age." Our lives are process. We are in exile. Our lives are about learning how to live with the wisdom of God Himself. This is our baptism: dying to self so that we can live in the divine grace. Baptism is always about dying, about taking a new course and about this ongoing process of conversion. *Officer: "Soldier, do you have change for a dollar? Soldier: Sure, buddy. Officer: That's no way to address an officer! Now let's try it again! Officer: Soldier. Do you have change for a dollar? Soldier: No, SIR!. The basic need for conversion is humility.*

Have you ever tried to change? Has this been easy? What about an evil person like mass murderer can they change and become good people? That's where God comes in. God's intention is to change us through and through. When we come to God, as sinners with empty, broken lives, God forgives, cleanses us and saves us. Then he begins the process of changing us – of making us like Jesus. We have a tendency to identify ourselves more with our sinful past than our sanctified future. We think things like, I have no control over my temper...I am powerless over food...I'm basically a dishonest person...I'm a total failure as a husband, father, wife or mother. Those things may have been true of us in the past, but God wants to bury the past in the past. What was true of us yesterday doesn't have to be true today. God wants to move us into an entirely new realm of existence. He wants us to come alive spiritually. My life as a Christian is not the result of my incredible good deeds or the result of my tremendous faith, it is the result of God's overwhelming grace! God wants our lives to be an example of the goodness of God. He wants our lives to reflect all that God can do in a person's life. We need to be humble like Jesus to hear the voice from heaven.

When an artist makes his living selling his paintings at art shows, though he has an inventory of a thousand or more paintings, he will put only 20 on display. That way people attending the art show will take a careful look at his best work. That makes sense. If we want others to see what we are capable of doing, show them our best work...put our best foot forward. God wants us to be his "best foot". He wants us to be the one through whom he can show the world how wonderful he is. So the voice from heaven: This is my beloved Son, listen to him. A woman marries a man expecting he will change, but he doesn't. A man marries a woman expecting that she won't change and she does. This is life. Christian conversion and deep change in our lives can only come about as we come to know and believe that we are beloved by God. This is why the voice at the baptism of the Lord is so important and why we must also hear that voice of God speaking to us: You are my beloved! So much of Christian history shows people who tried to be what they thought God wanted them to be and turned out to be people who killed others and condemned others. God wants us to love, to know how to love, to grow in love and to share that love with Him and with others. Let us rejoice in the baptism of Christ and embrace our own baptism in Him.