

Baptism of the Lord

When I was a young graduate student, I was blessed to have come across a great professor through my studies at Kansas University. I thought I'd shared some of his thoughts I gathered from Fr. Mark Link that apply to the Baptism of the Lord.

You'd hardly expect the dean of American psychiatry to stand up and talk about sin. But that's what Dr. Karl Menninger does in his book *Whatever Became of Sin?* Dr. Menninger was deeply troubled by individuals who won't admit to their personal sins. He was even more troubled by their refusal to admit to their social sins. What does Menninger mean by a social sin? He means a sin committed by society. He means a sin committed by groups of people or even nations. Here are some examples: citywide disregard of the poor, nationwide stockpiling of military hardware, planet wide destruction of the environment. The frightening thing about these social sins is that single individuals, like you and me, don't consider themselves responsible for them. We don't see ourselves as guilty of them. And so we wash our hands of them.

How different was the attitude of Jesus when it came to accepting responsibility for social sins. To learn what Jesus' attitude was, we need only turn to today's gospel and ask ourselves this question: Why did Jesus step into the Jordan River to be baptized by John? John had the same question in mind when he saw Jesus step down into the water. Matthew says that when Jesus presented himself for baptism, "John tried to prevent him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?" Matthew 3:14 Why, then, did Jesus step into the Jordan River to be baptized by John? For John had made it clear that his baptism was for sinners only. It was for those who had turned their back on God. If Jesus had not done this, why did he present himself for baptism?

This brings us back to Dr. Menninger's point about social sins, that is, sins committed by groups or nations. By being born into our world, Jesus identified himself with the human race. He became a member of a sinful world of people, a world of people of whom the psalmist said, "All alike have gone astray ... there is not one who does good, not even one. Psalm 14:3, And that's why Jesus stepped into the river to be baptized by John. It was not because he, personally, was a sinner and needed conversion. Rather, it was because he was a member of the sinful human race, which needed conversion. It was for this reason that he stepped into the river to be baptized. It was to acknowledge that he had identified himself with the human race so totally that he could not stand apart from it- not even from its sins. It was to acknowledge that the human race, of which he was a part, needed to admit that it had sinned and needed conversion. This is why Jesus stepped into the Jordan to be baptized by John.

The example of Jesus in today's gospel is a call to action to all of us. It's a call to recognize that we are all members of the human race, as Jesus was. It's a call to acknowledge our responsibility when it comes to social sins, as Jesus did. It's a call to do something concrete, whether it be speaking out against these situations, praying for guidance, or becoming directly involved in their solution.

If we, the members of Christ's Body, don't do something, who will? This is the call that today's gospel makes to us. It's a call we must ponder prayerfully. It's a call we must all respond to in some concrete way. When we respond to this call, I will know, and you will know that....

YOU ARE LOVED,

Deacon Dan