

“The heavens were opened ...the Spirit of God descended ...and a voice came from the heavens...”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Once upon a time, two women went to a yard sale. The first, I'll call Ann; the second, her friend, I'll call Betty. Ann had just sorted through a tray of trinkets. Betty came up to her & asked,

“Any luck?” **“No!”** said Ann. **“It's just a pile of junk.”**

Ann steps aside to let Betty see for herself. Betty takes one look at the pile and exclaims:

“I can't believe it. I just found a treasure! This cross is made of pure, antique silver.”

When Betty got home, she cleaned the cross and polished it. It was, indeed, quite the treasure. This story ends with Ann saying:

“Betty & I both looked at the same cross. I saw only junk; Betty saw a treasure.”

But, wait. This story is not over.

Later on, Betty's 7-year-old son, Bobby, picked up the cross, held it reverently in his hands, and looked at it for a long time. Suddenly, he broke down and began to cry.

“What's wrong?” asked Betty, as she rushed to him in a panic.

“I can't help it,” said Bobby. **“ ... I was looking at Jesus on the cross”**

3 people looked at the same cross. One saw junk; one saw treasure; & a 3rd saw Christ-crucified!

What's true of that cross is true of the Gospel.

3 people can hear the same Gospel story, but react to it in 3 different ways:

The 1st person merely LISTENS to the story and does no more.

The 2nd person LISTENS to the story & tries to LEARN the story's meaning, and does no more.

The 3rd person LISTENS to the story, LEARNS the story's meaning, & then tries to APPLY the meaning of the story to his/her own life!

And so, 3 approaches to the Gospel are to LISTEN to it, LEARN from it, & to APPLY it to one's life.

I will now utilize this system on today's Gospel, which I/deacon just read to you from St. Matthew.

1st, we LISTEN very carefully & hear that, when John baptized Jesus, 3 unusual events took place: The sky opened, the Spirit descended, and a voice spoke from heaven.

2nd, we try to LEARN the meaning of the story. In other words, we try to learn the meaning of the sky opening, the Spirit descending, and the voice speaking.

So, the sky opening...what does it mean?

In their imaginations, ancient Jews pictured God, as living somewhere above the sky. The sky was a kind of barrier between heaven and earth. If God wanted to come down to earth, he had to break through this barrier. This explains Isaiah's words when he asks God to save the world:

“Why don't you 'tear open the sky' and come down?” Is. 64:1

The Psalmist prays to God in a similar way, saying:

“O Lord, tear the sky open and ...save me.” Ps. 144:5-7

This brings me to the 2nd unusual event ...the image of the Spirit hovering over Jesus & the water.

This image is almost identical with the image the Book of Genesis uses to describe creation:

“God's spirit hovered over the water” JB-Gen.1:1

The image of the Spirit moving over Jesus and the water at his baptism suggests that the new era, just beginning, is a 'new creation' or a 're-creation' of the world.

And that brings us to the final image, **the voice from heaven** saying:

“This is my beloved son.”

These words of God the Father identify Jesus as his Son. Thus, Jesus can now be seen as ...**the “new Adam” of the “new creation.”**

Incidentally, Paul compares Jesus and Adam this way:

“The 1st man, Adam, was created a living being; but the last Adam (Jesus) is the life-giving Spirit. The 1st Adam came from the earth; the 2nd Adam came from heaven.... Just as we wear the likeness of the man made of earth (the 1st Adam), so... we will wear the likeness of the Man from heaven (the 2nd Adam, Jesus).” I Cor. 15:45-49

And so, we summarize the meaning of the baptism of Jesus in these words:

Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River marks the start of a “new era” in history. The “new era” is a “new creation” in which Jesus is the “new Adam.”

3rd, besides LISTENING to and LEARNING the meaning of the unusual events of Our Lord’s baptism, we can relate to it and **APPLY** it to our lives, that is, live it.

‘Exactly how do we relate to the story of Our Lord’s baptism & **apply it to our lives?’ you ask? Well, I am glad you asked that question!**

One way we can relate to and apply the episode of Christ’s baptism and its unusual events to us... is to do what 7-year-old, Bobby, did with the silver cross in my opening story. We can think about the story in our minds and pray over it in our hearts.

For example, we can recall that the “new creation,” which began with the baptism of Jesus, became a personal reality for each of us at our own baptism.

You see, when we were baptized, in a very true sense, the sky opened above us, the Spirit of God descended upon us, and a voice said to us,

“You are my beloved son/You are my beloved daughter.”

Listen to what Paul said to a group of newly baptized Christians:

“When you were baptized, you were buried w. Christ & in baptism, you were raised w. Christ. You were, at one time, spiritually dead because of your sins.... But, God has now brought you to life with Christ.” Col. 2:12-13

Paul, then, gives a beautiful explanation of how Christians ought to apply Jesus’ baptism to their lives and to live it. And, it is with Paul’s beautiful words that I end this morning’s/evening’s homily:

“You have been raised to life with Christ, so set your hearts on the things that are in heaven.... Keep your mind fixed on things there, not on things here on earth.... Your real life is Christ &, when he appears, you too will appear with him and share his glory!”
Col.3:1-4

But, for us to ever share in his glory, we must first **LISTEN, LEARN, and LIVE** (APPLY) the lessons of Christ in the ‘here and now’--in our corner of the vineyard...where we live, eat, and sleep.

I pray that almighty God, our Abba, will give you the grace to --so live....

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.