

“Namaste”

In David Whyte’ book, Fire in the Earth, there is a story of a young American traveler who is hiking in the mountains of Tibet.

The young man came to a broken foot-bridge, hundreds of feet over a rocky stream. The cables had snapped and the wooden planks tumbled together uselessly. Clearly, he could go no further. The strong and usually confident young man could not bring himself to cross the trembling ruined bridge. Disappointed and admitting defeat he decided to turn back.

As he was about to leave, an old, old woman – bent-over and barefoot – with an enormous basket balanced on her back, approached. She had been collecting dung for fuel along the path. Seeing the young man, she smiled and extended the traditional greeting: “*Namaste!*” – “*I greet the God in you!*”

The young man bowed in response, but before he could look up again, the old woman was gone, having almost floated straight across the treacherous broken bridge that seemed so impassable.

Without thinking, swept up in the wake of her courage and trust, he prayed “*Namaste!*” and followed the old woman across the bridge.

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Sisters and brothers, what the people of the Himalayas call “*Namaste,*” mirrors the Spirit that descended upon Jesus as he comes up from the waters in the Jordan. The Spirit – “*Namaste*” – speaks to every human being in the deepest and most hidden part of our hearts about the love and compassion of God: *Namaste* is the very life of God animating us; it is a wellspring of grace and wisdom, of courage and perseverance, enabling us to make our way over the rugged mountain paths and treacherous bridges of every life’s journey.

Today’s Gospel is the final event of Christ’s Epiphany: Jesus’ Baptism at the Jordan by John. Our Christmas celebrations officially come to an end today – at the banks of the Jordan. Jesus is no longer the child of the Bethlehem manger, but the adult Redeemer, making his way to Jerusalem. The Good News spoken by the Angels continues to unfold; the most wondrous parts of the Christ story are yet to be revealed.

So important was Jesus’ Baptism to the early Church’s understanding of Jesus, that all four Evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) record the event. Luke presents Jesus as the last person to be baptized by John, bringing John’s ministry to completion.

Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan becomes the moment of God's anointing of His Messiah (which literally means "anointed one") for the work – the ministry he is about to do. In the Spirit – "*Namaste*" – God rests and lives in Jesus.

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Sisters and brothers, what does all this mean to us, who are Baptized into Christ Jesus, over 2000 years later, gathered here today in the name of Jesus?

What does it mean to the 29 folks baptized in the last year here at All Saints or the 168 Baptized here since our Parish began in November 2008?

Brothers and sisters, in our own experience of Baptism – that same Spirit, that same "*Namaste*" of compassion, justice and peace that "descends" upon Jesus at his Baptism by John at the Jordan, *descends and rests upon us* --- compelling us, calling us, urging us to take on the work of the Gospel. In Baptism, we take the name 'Christian' and are called to embrace all that that holy name means: to live for others, rather than for ourselves, in the imitation of Christ. Our Baptisms, and later our Confirmations, and our day-to-day prayer commitment to Jesus and his mission, and our weekly gathering to break open the Word and the Eucharist makes each of us the servant of today's readings: to bring forth in our world, our nation, our city, our parish, our families and relationships - the justice, reconciliation, enlightenment, and mercy and compassion Christ – the "beloved" and "favored" child of God.

Sisters and brothers, that's what our faith is all about, that's what our lives ultimately are all about... but we know full well that it's a lifelong journey blossoming little-by-little; as I like to say: we're like precious works of art in process, ...progress not perfection. Little-by-little – through continuous conversions and change – we become more and more the person and people God intends us to be....

We know, though, that things get in the way: distractions, sins, false gods like money, power, popularity, prestige ... human weakness get us off track.... We fall down, but *Namaste* gently picks us up and we keep going..., growing and changing and becoming more fully alive, more fully human. And we also know full well, that we can't do this alone, that's why we have the church – the Parish – a Community of Faith where we can be fed and challenged and encouraged through continuous conversion to become *who God created us to be*, to live out our Baptism: the Grace of God – *Namaste* – within and among us!

Sisters and brothers, one of the greatest hindrances to our recognizing and embracing our baptismal call in our church for centuries has been the false teaching and sin of 'clericalism' engrained in the church for hundreds of years that has separated the ordained: the pope and bishops, priests and deacons, from the Community of the Faith and has put them on a pedestal, with the notion that the ordained have a far superior power and grace; more "*Namaste*" than the Community of the Baptized, a teaching and attitude which *de facto* for centuries has pacified the faithful to "pray, pay and obey"! This sin of clericalism is alive and well today – the center of the evil of the clerical sexual abuse crisis. As well documented, cover-up by Church officials sought primarily to protect the Institution and unaccountable privilege of the ordained, at the expense of the most vulnerable.

A second manifestation of the impact of the sin of clericalism is the fact that, even as we gather here this morning, three-fifths of the faithful around the world do not have access to Eucharist on a weekly basis because of a “shortage of priests.” As we all know: our own Diocese – not unlike diocese’s around the country – has closed 40 parishes, many of which were thriving communities of faith, simply because of the lack of ordained – celibate, male pastors – while, as again we all know, many women and married men are ready, willing and able to serve the call to pastoral ministry.

Over and over again Pope Francis, in every one of his addresses to priests, cardinals and bishops calls out and condemns the sin of clericalism. According to Pope Francis, we need to take the traditional model of Church as a pyramid – with the Pope on top, Cardinals, bishops, priests and deacons just beneath – with the religious women in there somewhere – all followed by the faithful laity at the bottom – and turn it upside-down, with the Community of the Baptized forming the Body of the Church and the ordained, distinguished only by a call to serve the entire community. Perhaps an even better model – proposed by our Fr. Andy during our group discussion of the Pope’s Encyclical *Laudato Si’* – is a *circle*, with Christ at the center surrounded by all the Baptized joined together in service to Christ’s Mission, by serving one another and our common home, Mother Earth. Over the course of this year I hope that we will find time to continue to reflect on this issue in the church and in our parish.

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In 2003, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops actually called on three lay persons – experts in the fields of theology and human sexuality – to advise them during the clerical sexual abuse situation. One of these experts, Scott Appleby, said the following:

“In the church all are one in Christ; ‘there is no Greek or Roman, Jew or Gentile, no male or female’ — and no hierarchy of privilege or status or honor conferred by ministerial office or rank alone. All baptized believers immersed in the sacramental life and apostolic works of the Catholic community are to be respected as equal inheritors of the ancient traditions and full participants in the work of redemption, a work accomplished by and through Christ alone. The church, catholic and apostolic, is a graced community of sinners and pilgrims, and those who receive holy orders must never set themselves apart from or above the faithful; to the contrary the clergy must be subject like the laity, to the correction and exhortations all the faithful.”

Powerful words!

And so, my sisters and brothers, let us pray:

Raise us up out of the waters of our baptism, O God,
and send down your Spirit to dwell within our hearts.
May we live lives of humble gratitude and integrity,
always aware that your love is a power
greater than anything we possess of our own;
may our struggle to live faithfully the Gospel
of your beloved Son
make us worthy of our baptismal name: Christian. Amen