



2nd Sunday of the Year 14 January 2024

Reflection Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Speak Lord, your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3)

On Monday this week 8 January, the Church celebrated the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. One parish had this prayer posted on the Internet:

“Lord Jesus, fill me with your Holy Spirit and inflame my heart with the joy of the Gospel. May I open my heart to the unfathomable grace of my own baptism each and every day and more fully live with you as a child of the Father. May I find joy in seeking to please you just as you found joy in seeking to please your Father. Amen.”

Meanwhile in the Sistine Chapel in Rome Pope Francis, as is the custom on this day, was baptising children. He was heard to say: *“Baptism is the most beautiful gift that Catholics can give their children.”* He went on to present each family with a lighted candle (the symbol of Christ, the Light of the world) and encouraged the families to celebrate the date of their children’s Baptism each year. We should know the date of our Baptism, the date of our becoming children of God, and give thanks.

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord draws our attention to Jesus’ wish to be identified with us, though He did not need the Baptism of Repentance; He did not need to be cleansed of sin. We were reminded in the Gospel:

“It was at this time that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptised in the Jordan by John. No sooner had he come up out of the water than he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit, like a dove, descending on him. And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on you.’” (Mark 1).

The Second Sunday Gospel reading from St John immediately follows the Baptism by John, and Jesus begins to gather followers. The first followers sought out Jesus because of the testimony of John the Baptist. We are familiar with the title John the Baptist uses for Jesus – the Lamb of God. We hear it each time we come to Mass at the Breaking of Bread.

We learn in today’s reading how Jesus’ first followers were gathered. Loyola Press in its commentary in ‘Sunday Connection’ explains: “The first two, Andrew and another man, were followers of John the Baptist. After hearing John’s testimony, they became followers of Jesus.... In the exchange between Andrew, the other disciple, and Jesus, we see an example of the first century Jewish rabbinical schools. Jews sought out rabbis and

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established themselves as disciples of a particular rabbi. Jesus appears to have been unique in that he sought out individuals, inviting them to be his followers. In the passage that follows, John's Gospel tells us how Jesus took the initiative in calling Philip and Nathanael.

Jesus asks Andrew and the other disciple "*What are you looking for?*" Andrew, Simon and the other disciple were looking for the Messiah and they had found him.

In the early Church families having found Faith were often baptised together. Many Catholics these days have been baptised because of the Faith of their families: the parents had found Jesus and His Church, and they wanted this for their children. However, there are times when, as we journey in life, we need to revisit the question that Jesus asked Andrew, Simon and the other disciple "*What are you looking for?*"

I was watching an interview this week where Bishop Robert Barron, a well known "evangelist", was interviewing the actor Shia LeBeouf who starred in last year's film on St Padre Pio. The part led him to love of our Faith: he had come into the Church after a time of career drift, bouts of alcoholism, violence and domestic abuse. He acknowledged he had been pleasure seeking, selfish, dishonest, inconsiderate "a troubled and troubling human being." We are not all going to have the opportunity of an acting role where preparation for it requires us to get deeply into the life of a famous Saint like St Pio, but I am sure that the Year of Prayer we are entering now in preparation for the Jubilee Year 2025 will give us the opportunity to hear the Lord calling us, as He did Samuel in the First reading, "*Samuel! Samuel!*" The question is will you be listening? Speaking with Cantonese speaking Catholics from Hong Kong this past Sunday evening we came to the conclusion that we should have a Day of Prayer in April where we will focus on the Year of Prayer (don't forget the old Catechism defined prayer as "*raising up the mind and heart to God*") in collaboration with the Diocesan Programme. A priest from Hong Kong will lead us in the Day: everyone will have a chance to hear again Jesus' call that was first spoken to us at Baptism.

I will put forward the prayer favoured by Pope Francis 'Sub Tuum Praesidium' (the oldest known Marian Prayer found on Egyptian Papyrus 250):

"We fly to thy patronage, O Holy Mother of God; do not despise our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin."

May we respond anew to the call of Jesus!

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