

Homily for the Baptism of the Lord, Year B, 10th/11th January 2015

Over the Christmas season of eating and drinking, many of us will have enjoyed a good claret. If so, you will know that the recent good vintages in Bordeaux wines have been the years 2000, 2005 2009 and 2010. Some of you may still have a '95 or '96, or even '89 or '90. These good vintages take time to mature, they continue to improve with the years and can take a long time. It is the same with getting to know and trust a person; it is the same with taking ownership of our baptism and living out our baptismal identity.

In June I visited the Holy Land and saw the traditional site of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. A rather murky bit of water today I have to say. But I have been to the spot on earth, or somewhere near, where John baptised Jesus. At the moment of his baptism, a voice was heard "You are my Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well-pleased." It was at this moment that Jesus' identity was revealed as the Son of God. The event of our baptism reveals who we are too, beloved children of God with whom God is well pleased. Our baptism has initiated us into a new relationship, a new way of living, a new identity, an identity based on a relationship with God and his Son, Jesus Christ. Our whole Christian life is a journey in which we progressively take ownership of and enter into this relationship. God has claimed us as his own; we grow into this identity and allow God to lay claim to us by being open to the Spirit who dwells in us by following the promptings of the Spirit and allowing our lives to be directed, changed and challenged to live out our baptism.

So it may be appropriate, on this Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, for me to make a tentative link to my baptism into parish ministry and for me to unveil something of my approach to the role as Parish Priest for Worth Abbey Parish. These are preliminary thoughts after just a week in post, so please don't hold me to these too severely.

Father James has left the Parish in very good shape, he established structures and leaders and so I have some very firm foundations on which to build. Let me reassure you that I don't intend to make any radical changes, some tweaks maybe (c.f. *In Touch*). Rather I will bring my own skills, talents and interests to the role, as well as my northern, mischievous sense of humour.

Before I took up this role I visited several parishes in the Diocese, to see how other PP's approached their role, what advice they could give me, what their priorities were. They gave me some ideas.

So what might my priorities be? I have identified four (so far):

- **Education:** religious education or formation in the faith
- **Youth** and young people; the church of the future
- **Evangelisation** - it goes a bit against the grain for a reserved Englishman to evangelise but there is a strong movement in the Church towards evangelisation, New Evangelisation, the Pope's letter, we can't avoid it I'm afraid
- **Care** - we have a parish which cares and you are doing wonderful things in many ways, Irundu, support of food bank, Traidcraft, tithing

EYE-C, or I see (a bit corny I know)

How might we do this? The second Parish Development Plan runs from 2010 to 2015. So it is time now to work together to produce the third Development Plan, which will run to 2020. That will be the blueprint to develop EYE-C.

Examples of what this might look like:

- 1) **Education** is already happening in several ways: AFG (Adult Faith Group) series of spring and autumn talks, RCIA. I would also, for example, want to support our parish leaders with additional training. To this end I have arranged for David Wills, the Adult Education Adviser for the Diocese, to meet with our catechists in two weeks' time to identify any training needs we may have. All are welcome.
- 2) **Youth** – we no longer have a Youth Worker and our rural location makes it difficult for young people to travel here, but a Youth Forum might be a step forward. And for an older age group I understand that pub talks are taking off!
- 3) **Evangelisation** – the Parish AGM in October requested an Alpha course in the parish. With the AFG, we have already done a bit of homework and plan to run “Alpha in a Catholic Context” after Easter.
- 4) **Care** of the sick and also visiting – I intend to make visiting a priority not just to those who are ill or housebound, but also to families; and we might look again at an SVP, J&P group.

Those are some initial ideas. I would like to challenge you and support you. I hope I can **support** the many generous leaders and ministers we have in the Worth parish. I know that some have been in their role a long time and some have multiple roles. Some may wish to take a break or to step down but can't see a successor, there may be some people here who are champing at the bit to be more involved; do let me know. And **challenge**; we all need to be challenged some of the time, I certainly do. Change can be challenging, some developments may be too.

I would conclude by asking you to consider offers and requests:

- Offers – what skill, time can you offer?
- Request – what do you want from me as your PP?

And why are we doing this? Because we are living out our baptismal promises, we are trying to fulfil our role as God's beloved, and we need the help of the Church, the help of each other along the way. Mine is a different way from yours, but we are all on a journey to discover what it means to be a baptised person. Jesus' journey started with his baptism by John in the Jordan. It ended with his passion, death and resurrection. Ours started with our baptism and will end with our death and entry into new life. What happens in between is why we are here.