

Baptism of the Lord-B

January 10, 2021

St. Patrick

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***Do we live any differently after coming forth from the waters of our baptism; and, shall we act any differently because we've been sprinkled today by the baptismal water?***

This question demanded an answer back in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The question also remains with us after a horrific week within our nation—one we would never have imagined witnessing at our Capitol.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century King Ivan the Great ruled Russia with a strong arm. Through war he freed Russia from the treachery of his enemies. He worked tirelessly to revitalize his country.

When it came time for him to marry, King Ivan chose the daughter of the King of Greece. Her name was Sophia. When Ivan asked the King of Greece for permission to marry his daughter, he agreed, and then the King of Greece added, “But there is one condition.”

“What is the condition?” asked King Ivan. The King of Greece insisted, “You must become a member of the Greek Orthodox Church.” “Why, of course,” said King Ivan of Russia. “It makes no difference to me what church I belong to. I’ll be glad to join Sophia’s church.” The King of Greece then informed Ivan that he would send a priest to teach Ivan about how to become a Christian.

That’s when King Ivan’s problems began. He didn’t have much difficulty in agreeing to his being baptized. The problem came when the priest outlined the requirements for baptism. One of the articles of faith stated that being a disciple in Jesus’ name and wielding the sword in war were not compatible.

“What!” objected King Ivan. “I can’t do battle anymore?” King Ivan was used to solving problems. There was no question in his mind that he would marry Sophia. He simply had to settle this “baptism” obstacle.

The priests of the Greek Orthodox Church made their plans to baptize King Ivan of Russia with 500 of his soldiers. On the day of their baptism by immersion, they came together to the body of water where the baptism was to take place. Five hundred priests were ready to administer this sacrament.

Together, King Ivan and his 500 soldiers went into the water. As King Ivan and his soldiers were immersed and baptized, each held his right arm with the sword high above the water. Their fighting arm and sword were left unbaptized! So it happened that King Ivan the Great became a member of the Church, married the princess of Greece...and kept right on fighting! (1)

Oh, it's easy to link that King Ivan with the mob that stormed the Capitol this past Wednesday, and with President Trump who sent them there with these words: "...you'll never take back our country with weakness. You have to show strength, and you have to be strong." Their violence and hatred run counter to the Christian symbols some of them prominently showed during their insurrection at the Capitol.

Friends: What does the Baptism of the Lord say to *us* this Sunday?

Today we hear from the opening page of St. Mark's Gospel—the Gospel that we'll be listening to throughout this year. It was the first of the four gospels written—probably in Rome, just after a gruesome bloodbath of persecution against the first Christians, carried out by Nero. Those Christians learned from that massacre, as well as page by page in the Gospel of St. Mark, what it means to be a follower of Jesus—all the way to *his* cross in Calvary.

They had to learn that their right arm is, in fact, baptized, consecrated. Again and again this year, St. Mark's Gospel will teach us that we can't use force. Jesus didn't, as he showed in accepting nonviolently the torture of the cross, with his last earthly words being, **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"**

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, martyred just four blocks from us here, witnessed untiringly for justice, protesting bigotry and hatred. As Jesus' disciple, though, Dr. King had to discipline himself by grace—and all who would march with him—to love the enemy while struggling for justice. In these times of a dangerous crisis we're called to be a voice and presence for justice, living the peaceable Gospel of Jesus, and doing so as Dr. King did, even when hatred buffeted him relentlessly.

But, you know, I'm in cahoots with King Ivan when what comes forth from my mouth are words that are vengeful and violent. I reject my baptismal consecration when I forget that my mind was likewise consecrated; and yet, I can become the final judge unilaterally inside my head. And, when I fail to condemn chaos and insurrection in the strongest terms possible, I have left my heart out of the baptismal waters.

Indeed, St. Patrick's, the Feast of Jesus' Baptism teaches us that every aspect of who we are has been consecrated and made holy in our baptism—our fighting right arm, our words that can spew out, and our hearts that can hate so easily.

We must condemn violence and hatred. In such a divided nation, we're called to struggle for justice without giving up—all the while manifesting that we're consecrated in *his* baptism—and also by *his* cross!

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(1) This account can be found in many sources, such as [The Unbaptized Arm - Faithlife Sermons](https://sermons.faithlife.com/sermons/37028-the-unbaptized-arm) @<https://sermons.faithlife.com/sermons/37028-the-unbaptized-arm>.

*General Intercessions*

*January 10, 2021*

*Baptism of the Lord*

**Empower all of us who have been consecrated in the saving waters of rebirth, that we might witness to the peaceable kingdom; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Bring about justice, healing and hope within our nation, as well as elsewhere in the world; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Quiet our hearts to hear your Word, and quicken our love for the poor and forgotten; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Strengthen those who struggle with addiction, and support their loved ones and families; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Give healing to those suffering from Covid-19; give protection to those who receive the vaccine; give support to all in the medical calling; and, give us all care in protecting others from the virus; we pray to you, O Lord—**

**Give to those who have died everlasting joy in your presence, especially Arthur Pera, Bailey Lauret; and all who have died from the coronavirus; we pray to you, O Lord—**

