

ARCHBISHOP NAUMANN'S ANNUAL APPEAL HOMILY



I. The Baptism Jesus Receives and the Baptism Jesus Gives

“You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.” These words of affirmation were spoken to Jesus by God the Father as Our Lord was praying in the Jordan after being baptized by John. From a human perspective, we know how important the love and approval of parents are to children.

John’s baptism was a prayer expressing repentance as well as seeking cleansing from sin. Jesus had no need to repent because he had no sins from which to be cleansed. Nevertheless, Our Lord chooses to seek John’s baptism making clear that an essential part of His mission was to continue John’s call for repentance.

However, the Baptism that Jesus commissioned His Disciples to perform offered so much more. Christian Baptism gives us a new identity, making us beloved daughters and sons of God and giving us an eternal destiny to live with the Lord and His saints forever.

Through Christian Baptism, we actually receive a share in divine life. God delights in us because through Jesus we have become beloved daughters and sons in whom He is well pleased. Our challenge is now to live in a manner consistent with the great dignity that has been bestowed upon us. If we understand the meaning of our Baptism, we will never doubt our worth or dignity. We will never cease being grateful for the gift of divine and eternal life.

II. Living Temples

The upper walls of the church, where I served as Pastor when I was a priest in St. Louis, were adorned with beautiful stained glass windows. Underneath the church, there was a hall. On Thursday nights, a Bible Study group met in the hall.

One Thursday while participating in the Bible Study, I heard a strange sound coming from the church above. It sounded like someone was dropping marbles on the church floor. At first, I chose to ignore the sound hoping whatever was causing it would resolve itself. However, the sound persisted so I went upstairs and entered the church just in time to see a rock come crashing through one of the stained glass windows. The noise I had been hearing was shattered glass falling onto the terrazzo floor.

I ran across the church and out the door on the other side, just in time to see a twelve year old boy throw a rock toward our windows. Unfortunately, he had a strong and accurate arm. The rock hit another bank of windows. (The Royals might be able to use him in their Bullpen next year.) However, he was not very fast. I was able to corner him up against the house across the street. At which point he began to offer a prayer: **“Forgive me God! Forgive me God!” I thought to myself: “This is a good prayer, for you could be meeting God shortly!”**

Eventually, the matter wound up in St. Louis County Family Court. The young rock thrower was named Victor. The Judge tried to make an impression on Victor by saying: **“Son, you did not just break glass. You did not just break windows. People come to Church to find peace, to find hope, to find love, to find God and you messed all of that up! You are fortunate to live in a country that respects human life. In some countries, your life would not be worth a dime. Perhaps, they might cut off your right hand so that you would not be throwing rocks anymore.”** Victor’s eyes grew big when the Judge suggested the amputation of his hand.

In the Judge's wisdom, he assigned Victor to several hours of community service to our Parish. I was not certain who the Judge was punishing Victor or the Parish. I got to know Victor a bit over the next several months and our staff got to know Victor even better. Victor was actually a very likable kid when he was not throwing rocks.

The tragedy about Victor was not so much that he did not understand the significance of the Church building. The tragedy was that he did not know who he was. He did not understand that he had been created in the Divine Image, much less that Jesus, the Son of God, gave his life on Calvary for him. He did not understand that Our Lord wished to make Him into a living temple that carries the very life of God. Victor did not know that Jesus wanted to share His life with him and make him a beloved son of His Heavenly Father. Had he known that he would not have been doing something as foolish as throwing rocks at church windows.

III. Our Mission

Each year, this Feast of the Baptism of the Lord reminds of the incredible dignity we have been given as beloved daughters and sons of the King of Kings. It also challenges us to fulfill our mission to help every other human being on planet earth know God's desires for them to share the dignity of becoming His beloved sons and daughters. We do this by sharing the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus, through words but also through our actions. We need to help others come to know God's love for them and to comprehend their great dignity as princesses and princes of the King.

IV. Call To Share 2019

One of the ways we fulfill this mission collectively, as an archdiocesan Church, is through our annual **Call To Share** Campaign through which we pool our resources to do what none of us as individuals or individual parishes could accomplish alone. The personal sacrifice that you make in giving to **Call To Share**: 1) helped Emily remain in a Catholic School even though her father lost his job; 2) allowed Catholic Charities to help Peter, a refugee, to find employment as well as housing for his family; 3) provided Stacey with the medical care, counseling and support she needed during her pregnancy; 4) made it possible for Jonathan to participate in Extreme Camp at Prairie Star Ranch last summer; 5) helped Charlie with down syndrome prepare to receive the sacrament of Confirmation 6) assisted Becky and Ben prepare for a healthy and happy marriage and 7) made it possible for Cheryl and Chuck to attend a Living in Love weekend that strengthened their marriage. Though the names are fictional, these examples illustrate the difference your gift to **Call To Share** makes in the lives of actual people.

As you are aware, the Archdiocese is also conducting the **One Faith, One Family, One Future in Christ** Campaign to address some extraordinary capital needs. Just as when our parishes conduct capital campaigns, parishioners are asked to make sacrificial gifts in addition to their usual weekly offertory donation that is essential to keep the lights on, the furnace and air-conditioning running, and pay the salaries for the parish staff; similarly the **One Faith, One Family, One Future in Christ** Campaign is seeking special gifts in addition to your support for **Call To Share** that helps to fund the annual budgets of the essential ministries that make a huge difference in the lives of so many each year.

I am always amazed and edified by your generosity to the Church in support of our efforts to proclaim the love and hope of the Gospel of Jesus to a world in desperate need of its truth. Our Catholic Faith, despite the challenges and failures of individuals within the Church, is such a gift and blessing. There are

so many in our communities, like Victor, who do not know Jesus and the joy of His Gospel. Filled with gratitude for the gift of your Faith and knowing the truth that you are a beloved daughter or son of God, I humbly ask you again this year to support generously **Call To Share**. Help us help the many Victors of the world discover their true identities as princesses and princes of the King of Kings. Help us help others know they are **Always Loved and Never Alone!**