



Immaculate Conception  
Church

Homily for the Feast of Baptism of the Lord  
2015

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I believe that in everyone's life, God places individuals who are true gifts and who serve to teach us about who we are and how we should live. I have been blessed with several such people. One of them, however, has always held a very special place in my heart. He was a bishop and his name was Bishop James Ryan. Bishop Ryan was the Bishop of Santarem, Brazil. During the Second Vatican Council he sat next to Bishop McVinney who was the Bishop of Providence. Bishop McVinney took a liking to Bishop Ryan and adopted his diocese as a center of charity and support from our diocese. We even sent three priests to work in his diocese for several years.

As a repayment for the generosity of our good Bishop, Bishop Ryan would come to our diocese each year for the month of May. He would spend every night administering the Sacrament of Confirmation throughout the diocese. When I worked in the chancery office I volunteered to take care of Bishop Ryan every night of his visit to our Diocese. I became his priest secretary.

Every night I would pick him up, drive him to the confirmation, act as his Master of Ceremonies and then take him home (he was a Franciscan and lived at St. Francis Chapel whenever he was in town). Through it all we became good friends. He was very much a father-figure in my life.

I remember him coming here to Immaculate Conception to administer confirmation. By then I was the associate here. Again, I volunteered to act as his Master of Ceremonies. It was a very special evening because on that night he celebrated his 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a priest and his 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a Bishop. As I was preparing to announce this, the Bishop pulled me aside and said: "Now, Ron, don't forget that what is really important is not how long I have been a priest or a bishop. It is how long I have been a baptized Christian." He had been baptized some 86 years.

Bishop Ryan keenly understood that whatever he had become in life was due not to his ordination to priesthood or the mitre he wore on his head but to his baptism. It gave me a great deal to think about.

What does my baptism mean to me? How do I live my baptism? How much of a disciple of Jesus Christ am I? Those questions lay before me as we celebrate this Feast of the Baptism of the Lord...a Feast in which we not only recall the Baptism of Christ but also our own baptism...our own entrance into the life of faith which has Jesus Christ as its center and its heart.

As we come to the end of the Christmas Season and as we reflect on the gift of our baptism, there is an old Quaker blessing that summarizes the meaning of all of this.

It reads:

*When the song of the angel is stilled,  
When the star in the sky is gone,  
When the kings and princes are home,  
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,  
The work of Christmas begins:  
To find the lost,  
To heal the broken,  
To feed the hungry,  
To release the prisoners,  
To rebuild the nations,  
To bring peace among all,  
To make music in the heart.*

To be baptized is to make real God's kingdom by the kindness, compassion and concern that we bring to any and all we meet in our lives. Most especially, it is to bring this tender compassion to the unloved, the unwanted, the poor, the immigrants and the outcasts for they are the incarnation of Jesus Christ in our world today. To serve them is to serve our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. To serve them is to live our baptism in our world today.

