

2020.01.19 Sunday2-A6 homily by Fr. Gabor

When I was preparing for today's homily I was asking the Lord to show me what he wants to tell us, and it became very clear to me that he wants me to talk about gathering and unity. This topic was unusually strong in my thoughts, and then when we watched the first part of Bishop Robert Barron's wonderful Catholicism series, in which he said that Jesus was sent to gather the scattered tribes of Israel, I took this as a confirmation. Gathering is one of the most important goals of our mission as Christians.

The Jewish people had about 4 expectations of the Messiah, based on the Old Testament: that he will gather together the people of God (Deuteronomy 4:23-27; 28:58-68; 30:1-3; Psalm 106:47; Jeremiah 3:17), that the Messiah will cleanse the Temple of God (cf. Genesis 2:10-14; Jeremiah 7:4, cf. Psalm 48), he will defeat the enemies of the Jewish people and free them (Leviticus 36:14-17) and finally he would establish the Kingdom of God (1 Kings 2:45; Psalm 89:29.36-37; Ezekiel 37:25; 2 Samuel 7:13.16; Isaiah 9:7). Jesus fulfilled all these expectations, but not in the way people wanted.

I would like to focus on the gathering mission of the Messiah, which is the foundation of our own mission as well; our mission to our family members and to people around us.

Isaiah in the first reading is a good example. He tells the survivors of Israel that God called him to restore the tribes of Jacob and gather the people of Israel back to God into a spiritual union with God.

A first century Jew, in Jesus' time, expected the Messiah to gather and reunite the people of Israel. Jesus starts His gathering mission with His baptism in the river Jordan, which we hear today again. This is a significant start for His mission, because through baptism Jesus declares that He completely commits himself to the Father. We commit ourselves to the Father through baptism as a sign of our commitment to turn away from anything that separates us from God the Father, and so we are reunited with Him, without this unity with the Father we cannot gather people to Him. This is why we renewed our Baptismal commitment last Sunday.

The key moment in Jesus' baptism is the descent of the Holy Spirit; and the Father's declaration that He is His beloved Son. This is significant, because it means that Jesus gathers people back to God by the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit. We know that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of unity, and we also know that we are children of God, because of the Holy Spirit in us. St. Paul says (Romans 8:15) we have received the Spirit of sonship, by whom we cry 'Abba, Father!' So we absolutely need the Holy Spirit for our gathering mission. Jesus is confirmed in his deepest identity as the beloved Son of God. As such He gathers people, by reminding them also of their long-forgotten identity, namely that they are also God's children and God is their heavenly Father. Jesus

reminds us of our identity as beloved children when He shows mercy to the adulterous woman and when he calls the disciples as children (John 13:33).

If we are children of God, that means as a Church community we are also a family unit. The Church is the family of God, where members should treat each other as brothers and sisters. Only when you treat others who are not your blood relatives as if they were your brothers and sisters will you promote gathering and unity. Most of the time I think we live as if we had lost our true identity as children of God, despite that we think of ourselves as His children. Why would I say this? Because most of us don't welcome others when we meet even in Church, but simply look away from each other, or pass by each other. In a Church or society where you don't treat others as your brothers and sisters, you become indifferent to each other, or competitors of each other, and negativity, disunity gradually creeps into your thinking and into the way you treat others.

So this year let us again put our relationship with God our Father and His parental love for each other as our first priority, and let us call upon the Spirit of unity to fill us and renew our identity as God's beloved children, and so go out to gather with Jesus, because whoever does not gather with Jesus, scatters (Mt 12:30).