

If you don't know the date of your baptism, look it up when you get home. In my opinion, it's the most important date of your life. Your birthday recalls your human life, your wedding anniversary recalls your love life, and we celebrate other days of achievement during the year. But the day we were baptized was the day we first shared divine life, the day the Holy Spirit first called us her home. To remember the date of your baptism is to thank God for his gift of love.

The anniversary of my baptism is January 11. This year Jesus and I commemorate our baptisms on the same day. I'm pleased that at least we have that much in common this year.

This is a baptismal candle. Whenever people come to St. Regis to be baptized--whether they are children or adults--they bring along a candle. (Light candle.) At baptisms, this candle is lit from what we call the Easter candle, the first one lit at Easter each year to dispel the darkness of night and to announce the resurrection of Jesus. This candle, then, symbolizes that baptism is a share in the life of Christ. We suggest that people keep the candle and light it each year on the anniversary of their baptism.

Today on the anniversary of Jesus' baptism, the Church invites us to imagine that day--to smell the Jordan, to touch the waters, to see the heavens parted, and to listen to the voice of God: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

In speaking those words, God quoted a passage from the Book of Isaiah which serves as our first reading today. This is something only God can do--he actually quotes something he himself said 800 years before. Many of us quote ourselves as an authority, but not with that kind of panache. Isaiah tells us that the person in whom God is pleased is one who works for justice, who will not break a bruised reed and will not quench a smoldering wick.

The Church invites us to remember Jesus' baptism so that we who are baptized might become like him, people who love justice, who will not take advantage of those who are weak, who will not ignore an exasperated child, who will not be deaf to the pleas of the sick, who will not grow rich while another grows poor, who will not break a bruised reed and will not quench a smoldering wick. (Extinguish candle.) Loving justice doesn't only mean praying for the oppressed; it means yielding on occasion when life gives you the upper hand.

We recall the mystery of baptism to keep the flame of faith alive in our hearts, so that when the Lord comes we may run to meet him beyond the Jordan and hear him proclaim, "This is my beloved child, in whom I am well pleased."