

**Homily — Sixth Sunday of Easter, 2018
by Rev. Bob Schramm, OSFS**

When I was a youngster, baptism was mostly about washing away original sin. Do you remember? Anyone who was not baptized had a kind of black mark on her or his soul, and that person was no friend of God. It was important to baptize an infant as soon possible after birth. That was a safeguard because if a child died before baptism, it would be confined to limbo for the rest of eternity.

Today's first reading suggests a different way of seeing baptism. Right while Peter is preaching to Cornelius and his household, but before baptizing them, the Holy Spirit comes on them all. That's confirmed with what is called the gift of tongues.

After receiving the Holy Spirit, this assurance that they are already friends with God, then they are baptized. So, they were friends of God even before they were baptized! What, then, is baptism all about, what purpose does it serve?

**Consider this:
It's about being WELCOMED.
It's about becoming part of a community of people who will teach you about avoiding the sin in our world by loving God and your neighbor and yourself.**

**Love comes first.
That's what the writer of our second reading says.
It's a very fundamental Christian truth.
"In this is love, not that we have loved God,
but that God first loved us. . . ."**

**Real love is not earned. It is freely given.
It's not about, "If only I do this, or don't do that,
then maybe I'd be loved."**

**Baptism is this "blessed assurance" as they say.
There is no greater dignity a person can have
than the assurance of baptism –
pope, cardinal, sister, monk.**

**On being assured that we are loved,
we are commanded to go out and be ministers of that love.**

**The Greek word for a community of Christians is "ekklesia."
That word means "Those called forth."
So, "a church" is group whose very existence is about
responding to God's initiative of love.
The rest is passing on what has first been divinely given.**

**"It was not you who chose me, but I chose you and appointed you
to go and bear fruit that will remain."**

**Here's some evidence I've seen that ministry happening lately:
Pasquale Shoe Repair — a whole Italian family doing "ministry"
repairing shoes and souls;
West Side Story — magnificently put on by high school students.**

Here are some powerful words I found about Jesus :

**Amidst all the darkness, hatred, bitterness, injustice,
and misunderstanding that surrounded him,
amidst everything that stood unfairly against him
and was totally contrary to his person and message,
Jesus struggled mightily to cling to a Source
that could give him the strength
to resist the hatred and violence around him,
that could give him the heart to forgive his enemies,
that could give him the graciousness to forgive the good thief,
and that could give him the inner strength
to turn humiliation, pain and injustice
into compassion rather than bitterness.**

That's meant to be about us, too.

You might be tempted to think:

**"Why am I so weak in belief, so far from Christ, so prone to sin?
This Holy Spirit Jesus promises must be pretty anemic."
Not really and perhaps here's the reason —
The Spirit always waits, waits, waits for us to receive the gift of life.
Jesus is not gone, he is knocking at our inner door.**

