



This is My Son

The Christmas Season ends with the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus. During this season, we have celebrated the gift of God's Son to us. His coming was prophesied in the Old Testament, where He is called "Emmanuel," which is Hebrew for "God with us." Joseph was commanded to give Him the name "Jesus," which is the Greek and Latin form of the Hebrew name "Joshua," meaning, "God saves." There were many in Jesus' time who tried to label Him in many ways to fit their own expectations. Even today, we have our own ideas about who Jesus is, and of what He is about. Once, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do you say I am?" In today's Gospel, God the Father makes a declaration of who Jesus is. He says, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." Later on, the Father would make a similar declaration when Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John. On that occasion, the Father said, "This is my beloved Son: listen to Him!"

God the Father says to us this very day, "This is my Son: listen to Him!" This command of God hearkens back to what is known to our Jewish brothers and sisters as the "Sh'ma," which means, "Hear!" or "Listen!" It is considered the greatest commandment, and comes from Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength." As I promised during Advent, we are entering into a visioning and planning stage for a new parish pastoral plan for St. Barnabas. But before we make such plans, we need to be sure they are God's plans. So, we first need to take some time to listen to Jesus, that we might hear His plans for us, and know where He is calling us. From now until July, I'm inviting all St. Barnabas parishioners to enter with me into a time of prayer and discernment, which we will call a discipleship phase. Then in late summer, we will begin to form a vision for our future together.

As disciples of Jesus, we are sent by Him on mission to the world around us. But let's look at how our Lord Himself began His public ministry. Before starting to work, Jesus had spent His first thirty years in formation, getting personally prepared for His mission. Then, He went to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. But Jesus was not baptized for forgiveness of sins, for He had none. At His baptism, Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit, and became recognized as the Messiah: God's anointed-one. Then, after being baptized, Jesus went into prayer and fasting for forty days. Only after a time of prayer and formation did Jesus begin His mission of service, by proclaiming the Gospel and laying down His life in service, to redeem the world. If Jesus prepared Himself in this way, then so should we.

Our discipleship, preparation phase, will include three essential and interconnected areas: prayer, formation, and service. We'll be engaging in these areas at the individual, family, and parish levels. First, I'm asking everyone to take up some form of prayer or devotion. This may include daily personal prayer, praying together as a family, or perhaps joining other families or small groups for some form of devotion. Pilgrimages and retreats are also encouraged. Second, I'm inviting us all to participate in some sort of faith formation, so that we might grow in our knowledge and understanding of our Catholic Faith and of what our Lord Jesus teaches us. Finally, I'm encouraging everyone to engage in some form of service to others, by which, through acts of charity, we lay down our lives for one another. Participating in these spiritual activities will help us better listen to Jesus, that we might hear Him when He guides us into the coming years here at St. Barnabas.

In our own baptism, Jesus has given us His power to bring salvation to the world. For us, Heaven is opened, we have been anointed with the Holy Spirit, and when the Heavenly Father looks upon us, He sees His own children, whom He loves. But we are baptized for mission: the same mission as Jesus. Before we focus on mission, let us take some time to listen to Jesus, as the Father commands us, "This is my Son: listen to Him!"

Fr. Roberts