

Raphael Amato – St. Joseph's Parish, Ottawa

Reflection on the readings of May 30, 2021

The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

First Reading: Deuteronomy 4.32-34, 39-40

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 33

Second Reading: Romans 8.14-17

Gospel Acclamation: See Revelation 1.8

Gospel: Matthew 28.16-20

As I reflected on the words of Jesus and his missioning the disciples, I must admit that I became somewhat uncomfortable at times and struggled with how to unpack the reflection with you. I have decided to be uncomfortable and, in some ways, invite you into this discomfort. It is out of this discomfort that I think we as Christian Catholics can enter into a true dialogue.

How did we and how do we respond to this call to baptise? in the spirit of power and dominance? Or in the spirit of love?

I invite you to reflect on the experience of our bringing the gospels to the First Nations.

I think that it is also important that we reflect on what does it mean to baptise? This is important as it is quite consequential with how we approach our mission to baptise.

Finally, I want to reflect on some ways to respond to Jesus' call today.

What is it that we can learn about the mission Jesus has given us as Christians now that we have over two thousand years of experience of responding to this call? We can quickly move to acting on what is Jesus calling us to, however we, as Christians, have been responding to Jesus's mission call for over two thousand years. How have we done? I believe that it is important that we take the time to review and learn from what we have done in the name of Jesus.

Imagine a Christian score card? How would you score our response to Jesus's call to baptize those who do not know Him? How did we bring this call to those who welcomed us into this country; the First Nations?

As a young immigrant to Canada in the late 50's and early 60's, I learned in grade school about our history bringing salvation to the first inhabitants of this country.

I know that we no longer teach the version of history that I was taught back then however, I recognize that many of us have been shaped by the framing of the way the story was taught, about how people of the first nations did not know Jesus, how they did not know God and most importantly needed to be "converted".

I learned that First nations' spirituality was "animistic" and that they needed to be taught the true religion.

How did we do? How would you score this experience? Why did we need to establish a Truth and Reconciliation commission if we were so good at spreading the gospel?

Over the years I have learned that much of first nations spirituality focused on relationships with each other, the earth and the inhabitants of the earth, that included animals. All were invested with spirit, and even inanimate objects at time had a spirit. It was important to stay connected to and honor these spirits. It was only as I matured in my own journey as a catholic that I came to see incredible wisdom inherent in the First Nations' spirituality the importance of what was important to those who welcomed us into this country. In fact, we are only waking up to the reality that it is our responsibility to care for our earth, and all other species that inhabit it. In this instance, I believe that we approached baptism through our tendency to dominate and overpower.

I would like to repeat Jesus 'words

“Go and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father,
and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”

I am reminded of two fundamental ways of understanding of what it means to baptize.

The first understanding of baptism is the notion of recognizing that we, as humans, have turned away from God, are sinners and need to acknowledge our sins in order to repent with the intent of never sinning again. This is the way that baptism was understood prior to the encounter of Jesus and St John the Baptist.

What occurs after Jesus' baptism adds a new understanding and depth to baptism. Baptism becomes being bathed in the knowledge of being the Beloved of God. This is the purpose of baptism, knowing that we are the beloved of God. This is what shaped Jesus' mission on earth and shaped his interactions with all he encountered. I believe that what Jesus was missioning us to do.

When I see baptism in this way, the scales fall from my eyes and I can recognize how we failed to do this. I also see that my faith journey has brought me to a place where I can acknowledge what was known and revealed to our First Nations prior to our coming here; that we are all interconnected; that each person is inhabited with a spirit, I see my connectedness to the earth and my responsibility to care for it. I read with joy Pope Francis' call in “Laudato Si” us to nurture and care for this home. I also share and honor all the other creatures that inhabit and share this home (except maybe for mosquitos).

If only our encounter with our First Nations was shaped by this understanding of baptism of our mission; to invite others to discover their “belovedness” and to teach them how precious they are in the eyes of God. ...and to learn from them.

We could have learned much more about the care of each other, our natural world and all the creatures we share our home with from our brothers and sisters of the first nations.

I believe that we need to respond to Jesus' call in humility; to let go the notion of holding the “truth” but rather discover the truth as we enter into relationship with each other. That in fact, both need conversion; those announcing the gospel and those who receive the gospel.

We move away from seeing our faith as the need to dominate and move to embrace the true power of love; we are able to be honest and see the tensions and contradictions that arise we review how we lived out our call to this mission.

We have and continue to bring baptism to others in this way. I have been fortunate to know many Christians who have embraced call of Jesus to baptise as one to bring the love of God into the lives of others, who do not see that the power and dominance of Jesus or of our faith is the way we convert the world. Dorothy Day, Tony Walsh of Benedict Labre house, Henry Nouwen, the people of L'Arche our own supper table. It is good to acknowledge and balance how we continue to baptise the world today by being witnesses to the call to convert by love.

In closing, what is the call for each one of us today in our broken world. How do we bring this message of salvation to others? How do we reconcile these two ways we have approached that seem so contradictory?

I would like to quote Richard Rohr in response to this.

“The people who hold the contradictions and resolve them in themselves are the saviors of the world. They are the only real agents of transformation, reconciliation, and newness. These “saviors” exist in every period of time and in every faith tradition. At times they exist even with no “faith” at all, beyond a consciously held belief that solidarity with all of life is, in fact, the meaning of life. For whatever reason, such people agree to share the fate of God for the life of the world now. These people feel called and agree to not hide from the shadow side of things or the rejected group, but in fact draw close to the pain of the world and allow it to radically change their perspective. They agree to embrace the imperfection and even the injustices of our world, allowing these situations to change them from the inside out, which is the only way things are changed anyway.”

We live in these contradictions, and we do not need to run from them, but rather embrace them and be transformed by them if we genuinely want to baptise in the name of the Father, son and Holy Spirit.

In prayer,

Raphael Amato