
REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE AND WHOSE YOU ARE

I want to talk about this passage in terms of one important thought:

- You only know *who* you are when you realize *whose* you are.
- I used to say something similar to my children when they were younger before they would go to an event or trip:
 - Remember *who* you are and *whose* you are.

When you stop and think about it, our identity is not something we forge on our own.

- Most of our sense of who we are comes from the community we belong to: our family of origin and the people with whom we spend time regularly.
- In this sense, identity is always given and developed, not just simply created.

An example. No one wakes up one day and say, "You know who I'm going to be? I'm going to be one of those crazy people who paints their face, wears a costume, and goes wild at football games."

- Instead, you hang out with friends, watch lots of football, decide to go to a game, discover someone has brought body paint, and only then do you realize that you *are* one of the persons.
- You could say the same thing about those ladies in purple and red hats at restaurant,
 - or bikers, or Trekkies, or just about any of the other groups with whom we associate and from whom we derive a lot of our identity.

That's what makes Baptism so powerful.

- We are adopted into a family of faith and told that we are GOD'S beloved child, and therefore have infinite worth.
 - You've probably heard that before, but can you really hear it too often?
- I mean, the good news we hear on Sunday morning is that we *are* GOD'S children, that GOD is with us, that GOD loves us and values us and promises to guide us.
- And I wonder if, when you hear that on Sunday if you really believe it,
 - and if, by lunch on Monday, you've pretty well forgotten it?
 - Because it really is an important message about identity and belonging.

But you may be wondering, "What does baptism and identity have to do with this story of JESUS being tempted in the wilderness.

- And today I want to say, "Just about everything!"

If you go back a few verses in your Bible before today's gospel reading, you have the story of JESUS' baptism that we heard about two months ago.

- (Yeah, the lectionary does that sometimes, following a theological rather than a narrative order.)
- But remembering that JESUS is baptized and hears GOD say, "This is my beloved SON, with whom I am well pleased (similar to what we heard last week in the Transfiguration narrative) is crucial to understanding how JESUS navigates this temptation.

Because, you see, all the various temptations we may face in our lives and like JESUS in today's reading stem from the primary temptation to forget *who* we are and *whose* we are.

- And really, you can't know *who* you are without recognizing *whose* you are.
- You see, once you don't remember *who* you are and *whose* you are, you will likely be led to do all kinds of things to try to dispel the insecurity you feel,
 - and hope that you can find that sense of security and identity that is essential to being happy.

That's what happened to Adam and Eve in the first story we heard from Genesis.

- When the serpent came, he didn't start out with a temptation, but instead, created doubt and mistrust in Adam and Eve.
 - (And let me just say that this isn't just on Eve. Adam is right there all the time with Eve, but can't seem to find anything to say.)

In particular, the serpent tries to undermine the relationship of trust between GOD and GOD'S children.

- "Did GOD really say," the serpent asks, misrepresenting GOD'S instructions and creating uncertainty.
- "You will not die," the serpent claims, suggesting that GOD either hasn't been truthful or that there are things GOD isn't telling.
 - Only when this primary relationship is weakened are they susceptible to the temptation to find their identity on their own.
 - Choosing independence in their relationship with GOD, they take the forbidden fruit and eat.

JESUS encounter with the devil is, by contrast, nearly the opposite.

- The devil, like the serpent with Adam and Eve, also tries to undermine JESUS' relationship with GOD by suggesting that it should not be trusted,
 - The devil tells HIM that HE should weigh the truth of that relationship by going HIS own way by creating food for HIMSELF,
 - or test GOD'S protection by throwing HIMSELF off the temple,
 - or that HE should pursue HIS own power and authority apart from GOD and GOD'S will.
- Yet at each point, JESUS, unlike Adam and Eve, resists the tasty fruit which the devil dangles in front of HIM.
- JESUS challenges the devil, not simply by quoting Scripture in general, but by quoting Scripture that reminds HIM of GOD'S trustworthiness,
 - that highlights the need to depend on GOD for all good things,
 - and, consequently, of GOD'S promise to care for HIM and all of GOD'S children.

Adam and Eve are victims to insecurity about identity and forget whose they are,

- and thus, the lose themselves in the temptation to secure their identity on their own and apart from GOD.

JESUS, on the other hand, fall back on HIS relationship with GOD,

- reminding HIMSELF whose HE is—a dependent, but beloved child of GOD,
 - reliant on the providence, care, and protection of the GOD who has promised to do anything to care for HIM and for all of us.

There are so many temptations in the world, most of them not coming as luscious fruit hanging from a tree,

- but rather as subtle messages that seek to confuse us about our identity,
 - and invite us to forget who we are and whose we are.
 - So many commercials that suggest that we are inadequate.
 - So many headlines that advise that there is not enough to go around.
 - So many politicians of every party that claim that we have a great deal to fear.
- Yet, in the face of these identity-obscuring messages, we have the opportunity to root ourselves in the same baptismal promise that safe-guarded and empowered JESUS.
 - "This is MY beloved child, whom I love."

This is the baptismal promise that reminds us that GOD says we are totally enough,

- that there is plenty to go around,
- and that we need not live in fear.

Our identity comes from the people with whom we hang out and is always received and shaped by them, rather than created by ourselves.

- This identity comes, always as a gift and a promise.
- And that's why it is so important to remind ourselves that we only know who we are when we realize whose we are,
 - and then claim that we are, indeed, one of GOD'S beloved children.
- That's why we come to church.
- That's why we surround ourselves with the family of faith that keeps telling us that we—indeed all people—have value, worth, and purpose.

In fact, let me suggest that we intentionally take time to find someone here, someone who is a bit less known, or a bit different in personality or position than we,

- and take the time to say to her or him, "You are special and I'm glad you're here."
 - Take a moment to practice it now by turning to someone and saying those words, "You are special and I'm glad you're here."
 - And then find someone after worship and say the same thing.

And then, once we've gotten comfortable saying that here, try it on someone out there.

- Take a moment to help someone else reclaim or claim their identity by saying to them, "You are special and GOD cares about you."
- It might be uncomfortable or even feel embarrassing.
 - But it can also be an important first-step in helping someone else to come to know *who* they are and *whose* they are:
 - a beloved child of GOD.