

11 January 2015

Today's feast of the Baptism of the Lord reminds us of the wonderful and rich symbol of water that washes us clean, gives us the new life of the Spirit, refreshes us and quenches our thirst. Water is a precious gift. In today's first reading, the prophet Isaiah is very poetic in terms of describing how the rain and the snow come down from the heavens to water the earth providing seed for the sowing and bread for the eating. In fact, at the start of a sweltering Australian summer, we appreciate even more this rich symbol of water. And yet, as I was preparing this homily, I was conscious that many parts of Australia are facing severe drought as I speak. The earth is parched, animals are dying and seed cannot grow. For those on the land, despite years of experience, this is an even greater challenge as they face the continual decline of rural communities and a younger generation not wanting to take the responsibility of the family farm.

We probably don't value how precious water is when we turn on the tap when it suits us, are sometimes reckless with this precious resource and sometimes enjoy the luxury of two showers per day. But having experienced the reality of water restrictions a few years ago, we all got a valuable lesson in appreciating something precious that ought not to be wasted.

Water is the central theme of Christian baptism. Through water and the Holy Spirit we become a new creation, we receive the gift of faith and the promise of new life. In the waters of baptism, we die with Jesus and rise again with him to new life. Just like we are called to appreciate how precious the gift of water is, I think today's feast of the Baptism of Jesus calls us to value and deepen our appreciation of own baptism, of who we become and what we are called to be.

Baptism is for mission. We receive the gift of the Spirit to make known to the world something of the richness of God's love for us, to make known the depth and beauty of our gift of faith, to make known the fact that by the waters of baptism our lives have been changed and we are transformed by the life of the Spirit. In today's second reading, St John reminds us that baptism calls us to give witness to the great gift of faith. Through the sacraments, we are gathered and nourished and sent forth

as witnesses to the world. So soon after beginning a new year and wishing peace and abundant blessings to each other, on Monday the city of Paris was rocked by a brutal and barbaric killing spree. We are witnesses to peace, we are called to build a culture of peace and dialogue that does not get overcome by the violence that surrounds us. And we are called to never lose hope. As baptised Christians, we are called to be 'prisoners of hope' completely and utterly dedicated to this task. It goes to the heart of our Christian discipleship.

Just like in today's Gospel, in baptism we are called and chosen by God. Each of us receives that unique call and vocation. We receive the gift of faith and become living members of Christ's body the Church. As a people filled with the gift of the Spirit, let us pray for the parts of Australia desperate for rain. Let us pray for the victims of that terrible shooting in Paris and all shaken by such events. Let us pray to Jesus, the Prince of Peace, that he will change the hearts of those who turn to violence and draw us always into God's wonderful light.