

A Reminder to Remember

"This is my Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased." (Mt 3:17)

Gabriel Garcia Marquez, in his classic 1967 novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, writes about a village in Central America. A virus strikes this community and the virus causes amnesia. It becomes necessary to hire people from the outside world to help locals remember. They go around the village putting signs on everything with their names; "This is a floor," "this is a table." On the outskirts of the village, the outsiders place two more signs. "This is the village of Macondo," and another above it reading "God Exists."

Great literature is very often prophetic. Fifty years later, I think most of us would agree that our society is losing its memory of many good things. Who now remembers that this country was built in large part on a foundational belief in our Holy Scriptures? Who now remembers that the Scriptures our great country was founded on, commands us to care for the immigrant, the outcast, and God's creation? Whatever your personality or politics, perhaps everyone can agree that remembering who we are as a country and what we hold sacred is key to our unity and prosperity. Maybe we also need signs; "This is America." "In God we trust." "We are our brothers' keepers."

Well fortunately, when it comes to signs, you can find the most powerful ones still in church; and healing amnesia is our specialty. I preach about this a lot, that it is not by chance that we repeat 'Remember Lord (*Hishea Ter*)' a dozen times in various ways throughout worship. We are indeed cursed from birth with the virus of forgetting who we most deeply are. The good life, the Christian life is all about remembering where we came from and for what we are made. Today's holy day of the Baptism of our Lord is our great annual sign reminding us not only that God exists, but that we are his beloved children in whom he is well pleased.

Sleepwalking and forgetful like the characters in Garcia Marquez' book, we constantly need signs from outside our little world to rouse us. We find such a stirring sign in today's reading and ritual. It is the voice of God the father at Jesus' baptism resounding from the heavens; "This is my Son, the Beloved, in whom I am well pleased." At his baptism Jesus is revealed as God's beloved son, and by our baptism and relation to Him, writes St. Paul, we are adopted as children of the Father. Now few of us remember our baptisms, but God does; and that's the first sign he puts before us today. You may forget yourself. You may forget your God. But God will never forget you. No matter how far off you wander, you can't lose your father's love. No matter how bad things sometimes get, we are only a prayer away from his care.

But there is another sign before us today as beloved children of God. This one reminds us that since we are all children of the same Father, no one is in a position of judgement over another. Lately my kids are in a phase of trying to punish each other. 'Narek go to your room,' yells Nora. 'Nora, eat your chicken, or no dessert,' scolds Narek. 'Narek and Nora,' reminds Yn. Anna, 'you're siblings, we're the parents, we'll take care of this.' It's funny, but it seems that we never grow out of this. We still ignore Jesus' example of forgiveness and mercy, overstepping into judgement of one another, when judgement is for God alone.

The final sign before us today reminds God's children that he delights in us, with us he is well pleased. The older I get, having slogged through more of life's duties, disappointments and divisions, the harder this one is for me to remember. But today God repeats about humanity what he said about all of creation; 'it was good.' Despite our darkness and disobedience, God enjoys his children, enjoys the lives He gifts us and what we make of them. This is the lesson which my children keep trying to teach me; to put aside the troubles of the day, and simply delight in the gift of each other and the gift of each day.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez was profoundly correct that we humans always tends to forget who we are and what we were made for. But in church we receive constant reminders of a truth that is greater still. This spiritual remembering is not something that stays in our head, but goes to the roots of that word re-member; to embody, to make real again, to 're-member' that which has fallen away. This is of course the deepest meaning of how, in Jesus, we remember God. Jesus makes God manifest, real, brings him into daily life through common elements like bread and wine and the water we will bless today. Jesus makes God real by showing us that there is no limit to the power of self-giving love; it can transform individuals, families and countries. Jesus makes God real by reminding us, with so many signs, that we have a Father in heaven who made us, will never forget us and delights in who we are; now and always and unto the ages of ages, amen.