

# PASTOR'S POST

## HAND HOLDING

Dear Parish Family:

This year we celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. We do not often celebrate this feast on a Sunday. Most years it is celebrated on the Monday after Epiphany. So we have an extra week of Christmas this year which is a great gift for us.

The first reading today - for Year A of the Baptism of the Lord - is one of my favorite readings in Isaiah. When I celebrate Baptisms, I often use this reading. I love that it is a reminder of our mission but there is an important pre-condition for that mission.

"I have grasped you by the hand" (Isaiah 42:6).

This is the precondition for which we should be grateful and receptive. God wants to hold us by the hand.

A real challenge for me is that often I do not let God hold my hand. I am quick to try to do this on my own - even good things that are clearly in God's plan - without taking enough time for God to hold on to me, to support me, to direct me. Or worse, I can resist the invitation of God to draw nearer to me. That's usually not a sign of me doing good things. Can you see some of the same challenges in your own journey?

Listen to the words of the Father about, not to, the Son in the Gospel today - "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." When I celebrate Baptisms I sort of imagine God saying that about each child in the Church - and the parents and godparents and family members and friends - I love this kid! I am happy. I am with them!

This idea has been in my heart a great deal these days, particularly as we come closer to the end of the Christmas season. If God enters the world, if he becomes "in flesh", what am I, what are we, doing to make sure the presence of our God is at the center of everything we do as

individuals, families, friends, community and parish. Even if I "know" it is what Jesus would call us to do, am I (are we) working hard enough to make that connection - to see God holding our hand - in our decisions, actions, and efforts on behalf of others.

I find it significant that the prophet cites this connection first. We have to remember and recall this God who holds on to us before we take on the work of the Gospel - being a light, setting others free, raising others out of dungeons, feeding the

hungry, forming young people in faith, advocating for the oppressed, working to bring families together, confronting racism, and so much more. It is clear these things are in the Gospel and in the teachings of the Church. Yes! Amen! But do I allow God to be near me in my discernment, my work, my reflection?

As you can see in the pages of the bulletin, we have a lot of things happening. Some are more social. Some involve the transformational education of our school. Others feature celebrations of our community. Others are a call to service, particularly to those who are in need and so much more. As I approach these things this year, I am working harder to see how Jesus is in the middle of all of this, even if it may not appear to be so at first. I know he's there. I just need to focus more on seeing how what we do is coming from my relationship with him so that others may be touched by His presence.

Maybe a good reflection for each of us as we celebrate this Baptism of the Lord. Can I make a suggestion for this to become an image to pray with and reflect upon this week? Hold out your hand. Sit quietly. Imagine God taking your hand into his and just holding it and holding you too.

Hold out your hand. God wants to grasp it. Let Him.

Please pray for me. I promise the same.

*Father Jim*

