

Pastoral Message: January 9, 2022

As we come to the culmination of the Christmas season and celebrate a new year, I look back with gratitude at this blessed season we have celebrated. Despite our challenges with Covid and so many issues facing our country, I certainly have felt the light, hope, and joy within our community. I know many of you have faced challenges, but I also hope that through the love of Christ embodied through St Agnes you have had some experience of this good news as well. I want to thank you all for so much generosity, the many gifts and Christmas goodies that you shared with me. You truly are a welcoming, hospitable community.

Now a little reflection on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. I find myself in these days reflecting on the gift of the Holy Spirit given to us and all of creation, and I reflect on our own baptism and how knowing that the Lord walks with us so closely and empowers us to do the mission Jesus does is what this feast is all about. I think about the COVID vaccination and this reality of it saving lives. I know loved ones and friends that would have been in big trouble without the vaccination. The vaccination, if you think about it, brings healing to us and those around us. I also am aware of the sad reality of us losing loved ones and friends to covid. I bring up vaccination because, as we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, maybe it's a good metaphor for the gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We know the destruction in our world, but this gift of our baptism began with Jesus going public and bringing healing and justice around him. This same Holy Spirit wants to work through us. We all know the reality and, if we are honest, have probably spread sickness around us, but the Holy Spirit allows us to spread new life. If we look at the reading today of Isaiah, this Spirit works in a gentle way, and it moves out in a very inclusive way. The Jewish prophet in Isaiah points out that this Spirit would be a light that would spread to all nations. The responsorial Psalm reminds us that the Spirit desires to heal the cosmos and renew the face of the earth. Today, the Acts of the Apostles has a very relevant message for our church and country. The Holy Spirit breaks down walls of division. Wherever I look today I see so much division, and, sadly, we can even experience it in our own church. This has created so much that is toxic. The Acts of the Apostles and the Holy Spirit that Peter experienced today breaks through walls. He finds himself going to the Gentiles, a people who have a culture and traditions far different than him. Peter has to change his view. In a sense, this reading is foundational to our synodal journey because it seeks to listen to people that are different than us with the realization that the same Holy Spirit is at work in them. There was much conflict and difficult conversations in the Acts of the Apostles, yet the spirit helped them work through things to come to some compromises, to see the common good and work to carry out the mission of their baptism as a church. May this feast of the Baptism of the Lord renew us to hear Jesus say to each of us, no matter what our shortcomings or failings might be, this is my beloved son or daughter with whom I am well pleased. May the Holy Spirit make St Agnes a sign of unity, love, and healing in a world so in need of good news.