

St. Sebastian, Milwaukee
Cycle B Feast of the Baptism of the Lord
January 10, 2021
Offered by Mike Kamenski

MUSIC

1. **“This is My Beloved Son”** Pepper Choplin
Link 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDOBmbyZ4As>
2. **“This is My Beloved Son”** by Matt Cropper
Link 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zJAHanmvjiU>

Music Notes:

Link 1: If you follow my reflections, you will note that I often cannot settle on just one offering. Proceeding from today’s Gospel and the famous verse 11 of Mark 1, I have two *different* musical settings by the same title. Link 1 allows you to follow the music and the words (the recording is OK, but following the words might be recommended). Additionally, it has a most exquisite orchestration to accompany the voices! This is a dramatic and powerful statement of these important words by God the Father, spoken of the Son.

Link 2: This second version is a children’s song, yet arranged for adult SATB choir. It is performed here by the Tabernacle Choir with organ (4 hands) accompaniment. It is very interesting to hear another person’s “vision” of how musically this text might be set. The Cropper version is more gentle than the Choplin, more flowing and less triumphal. Each musical setting has a special message to share in bringing these sacred words to life through the medium of Music!

SPIRITUAL REFLECTIONS

“The Road”

By Fr. Ron Rolheiser

The older I get, the more I realize that there is a huge difference between speaking effectively, perhaps even brilliantly, and actually changing anybody’s life. It’s one thing to impress a person, move a heart, inspire someone, reveal the depth of some truth, help someone to understand himself or herself more deeply, or to teach and minister in a way that brings admiration. No small thing. But it’s something else, something much more difficult, to move someone in such a way that he or she actually changes and gives up the habits, compensations, addictions, indulgences, fears, and angers that stand between him and her and the joy of being a saint.

Only saints have the right to actually ask someone to change his or her life and have some power to affect that transformation.

Even when we are at our best, we are still not very effective in helping each other better our lives. In effect, people listen to us and say: “You’re wonderful, but this isn’t going to change my life!” Like John the Baptist, we are able to point out the way, but not able to help affect the transformation that’s needed for someone to actually change his or her way of life. That’s why there’s a lot more admiration than transformation inside religious and moral circles.

And that’s true too in the world at large. In the arts, politics, and academia, we’ve become masters at everything, except actually creating new beauty and actually bettering community. We’re brilliant at showing what’s wrong, but far less effective in actually improving the situation. If we’re honest, we can all truthfully speak these words (which John Shea puts into the John the Baptist’s mouth): “I can denounce a king, but I cannot enthrone one. I can strip an idol of its power, but I cannot reveal the true God. I can wash the soul in sand, but I cannot dress it in white. I can devour the word of the Lord like wild honey, but I cannot lace his sandal. I can condemn the sin, but I cannot bear it away.” Why? Why is our power less than our knowledge? When we know so much, why are we so powerless to change things?

Largely, I believe, it’s because our own lives aren’t integral enough. We aren’t saints, pure and simple, and only saints have the right to actually ask someone to change his or her life and have some power to affect that transformation. Why?

There’s a story about a troubled mother who had a daughter who was addicted to sweets. One day she approached Gandhi, explained the problem to him and asked whether he might talk to the young girl. Gandhi replied: “Bring your daughter to me in three weeks time and I will speak to her.” After three weeks, the mother brought her daughter to him. He took the young girl aside and spoke to her about the harmful effects of eating sweets excessively and urged her to abandon her bad habit. The mother thanked Gandhi for this advice and then asked him: “But why didn’t you speak to her three weeks ago?” Gandhi replied: “Because three weeks ago, I was still addicted to sweets.”

And there’s the lesson: we must do more than just point out the right road to others, we must be on that road ourselves. For this reason, the integrity of our private lives and private morals, down to the smallest detail, is the real power behind our words.

In her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*, Therese of Lisieux tells how she sensed that she could help others, across time and distance, by being part of the silent, hidden, moral heart within the Body of Christ. Hidden away in an obscure convent, she sensed she could help people outside those walls, and help the whole world, by being part of a hidden moral heart. And so she bore down in her private life and focused on making every action, no matter how small, pure and loving, believing that some universal power would flow forth from this private, hidden goodness.

How right she was! We know that from our own lives. Anyone who has had the right and power to ask us to make a real sacrifice has had that right and power only because he or

she was inviting us into a moral reality that he or she was already living, at least essentially. Conversely, we've all experienced how feeble is the invitation from someone who speaks the right things, but doesn't live them.

In the gospels, we see an instance where Jesus' disciples are perplexed because they're powerless to cast out a demon. When they ask Jesus about it, he says: "This kind is cast out only by prayer and fasting." That cryptic phrase contains more than we suspect.

The power to baptize with fire and spirit, that is, the power to actually change someone's life for the better, unlike the power to simply enlighten, issues forth only from a heart that is essentially pure, moral, and integral because only that kind of heart can cast out the real demons.

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