Baptism of our Lord C The Voice

We first heard it as a child—the Voice. We wanted that extra candy bar. We wanted to jump the fence in the back yard. We wanted to slug our annoying little brother. But we heard the Voice, “*Don’t! I know what Mom said.”* We may not have paid any attention to the Voice. But we heard it. We know we heard it.

As we got older, the Voice spoke a little more critically. *That was dumb. You really came off looking like a jerk. What were you thinking?* But the Voice could also be encouraging and affirming: *Nice work. You’ll be glad you did that. You didn’t deserve that*. The Voice would prod, nudge, and even clobber. As we grew up, we understood that the Voice was right.

Eventually, we made friends with the Voice. We didn’t just listen to the Voice. We converse with the Voice. *I’m not sure what to do here. What was that all about? How can I make things better?* And together, I and the Voice find a way to move on, to work it out, to put things back together. In time, we began to hear the Voice speaking more comforting and consoling words. *You are loved. You belong. You are mine.*

Search the Scriptures and you will discover that the Voice, that tiny whispering sound, is the Voice of God. God speaking to us in the events of our lives, in the people we love, in the characters and conundrums that challenge us. In today’s account of the baptism of the Lord at the River Jordan, the Voice is heard by Jesus: *You are my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.* With the descent of the Holy Spirit from *the sky rent in two,* Jesus becomes what John the Baptist had prophesied: *“One who is coming will baptize you in the Holy Spirit.”*

Advent began the Christmas cycle with Isaiah’s hope that God *would rend the heavens and come down.* The Baptism of the Lord fulfills the Christmas Story by revealing that this is precisely what happened. The *power of the Most High* overshadowing Mary, and *the Spirit descending upon Jesus in the form of a dove,* are one and the same God breaking into our daily lives. God, loving us so intimately, leaves the remoteness of the heavens, and makes His dwelling among us.

Today’s feast affords us the opportunity to reflect on our own baptism. By God’s gift of faith, we go forward from *change of heart* to *baptism*. In St Paul’s words, we become God’s adopted daughters and sons through the gift of the Holy Spirit. In St John’s Gospel account of the death of Jesus, *the One on whom the Spirit descended,* hands over the Spirit. To whom? To those who believe. To you and to me.

The Holy Spirit, the Voice, challenges us to live and proclaim the Good News amid the paradox of following Jesus, the powerful One, even to the powerlessness of the cross. You and I are the beloved of God. At our baptism, God claims us as His own. And unless and until we hear the Voice from heaven claiming that we are cherished by a God who is *“well pleased”* with us, we will never be able to truly cherish anyone, or believe that we are their beloved as well.

The Voice of God, our Father, speaks to all of us in the Sacrament of Baptism. The Spirit of God descends upon us, enables us to give to others the love God joyfully gives to us. May our hearts be attentive to that same Voice speaking to us in the course of the simple, undramatic everyday events of our lives. The Voice of God—cajoling and nudging us to His dwelling place.

