

Homily by Father Danny Grover,
January 13th, Baptism of the Lord

In the Gospel, we have the first unveiling, really, of the Trinity. For the first time in any story in scripture the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are present together in one place. So it's amazing that this happens at the baptism of Jesus, the baptism where John came and baptized him with water. The same baptism that we're going to celebrate, but only as part of the baptism we're about to celebrate. Because remember the sacraments of initiation aren't just baptism, the reception of the Eucharist and that of confirmation. Confirmation reminding us of the Feast of Pentecost where the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles in the upper room, as comes a fire. That John baptized with water, but Christ would come to baptize with the Holy Spirit. Reminding us that this Spirit weekend is about how we, as Catholics and Christians, are initiated in to the faith by water and the Holy Spirit. It is a reminder to us all that we were all called to come together as a community of faith every time we have a baptism.

It's interesting, you have different priests who go back and forth, "Well, should we have the baptism before mass, have the baptism after mass, have a baptism during mass?"

When I was going through seminary, I realized that I think we do a big disservice for the faith, and for the community, when we have baptisms of our young ones, especially not during mass.

Now, I may get some people that say, "Yes, Father, but it makes mass go a little bit longer." So do my homilies. But that's beside the point. (Laughing.)

The purpose is for us, as a Christian community, as the Body of Christ, to give thanks to God for all of the gifts that he's given to us.

I was reminded last night, in a family -- a church that does not have crying, begins to start dying. Super cheesy, I know. But it's very true. That unless we continue to have children, and unless we have these families, the parish, the church, isn't going to grow.

You go back to the Catholic Church 40, 50, 60 years ago, you couldn't find a family with less than five kids. You look at the world today, there are very few families with more than three.

Our ideology and understanding of children has changed from a blessing to a burden.

That's unfortunate, my brothers and sisters, that we don't see children anymore as a blessing. In fact, China, when we look back at the statistics, when they had -- you could only have one male child and the female child can only have a certain amount of children, that want to regulate births. It's interesting, in the next generation, they're going to lose half of their population because they don't have enough children to continue on the next generation.

And we think, "Oh, well, population control is the answer."

No, it is not.

A faithful heart is the answer, my brothers and sisters. Embracing the Love of God, who gives us life, is the answer. And the best way to embrace life, as a mother and a father, as a husband and a wife, is to share an intimacy where children can become children, the possibility of children rises. But it can't stop there.

We, as members of the Body of Christ, are called to raise our young ones as a community of faith. It's not just the parents and Godparents that are getting up here for Kate Rae. It's all of us coming together, as brothers and sisters of Christ, saying "This is one of our children. This is one of our present and future here in the church. How are we going to step up? How are we going to say, "Yes, I am here for you"? Interesting, in a family unit, brothers and sisters despise each other, they pick on each other, they bully each other, they fight with each other. I'm not going to lie. I've got four siblings. I'm just saying. But at the same time, if anything happens to one of my siblings, you've got to go through me to get to 'em. Right?

Why are we not that way with the Body of Christ?

We look at our brothers and sisters who are in pain, and we say, "Oh, I'll say a prayer for you." Not a bad thing. But we leave it there. We don't go a step further. We become so indecisive in our faith, that we don't know how to act.

And it's interesting -- obviously, I wasn't here last weekend, for those of you that didn't get the memo. I was in a conference in Indianapolis with 17,000 Catholic students, all college-age students, looking to continue to engage their faith. And the last conference that we had was by a Priest named Father Mike Schmitz. You may have heard of him. He's the priest that's on the TV and the media, and social media, talking about different things that young people struggle with.

And he said, "One of the biggest issues in our world today isn't that we don't care, it's that we don't act out of our love."

He said, "In fact, I have a story to tell you. On my way to this conference, I was on my flight from Minneapolis, here to Indianapolis, and there was a girl that was getting on the flight, and she got bumped and fell -- hit her knee and she shattered her kneecap getting onto the airplane.

And I looked up, over my seat, and I saw her. And I thought, "Well, the flight attendant went to her, her friends are there with her."

She made eye contact with me. "Okay, everything looks okay." So I sat back down. Things were still kinda going -- commotion-wise up there. So I looked up again, and I think I know this girl, but I'm not quite sure. I look up. She looks at me. I look around and I say, "Oh, she looks like she's doing okay." They get her off the flight."

Six hours later, he gets an e-mail from little Lucy, the college kid that had gotten on the flight that shattered her kneecap. And she said, "I saw you on the flight. I saw you. We made eye contact. And I was longing for you to come up and just say everything would be all right. That's all I needed. You couldn't fix anything, but I was really hoping, because I knew that was you. I've seen your videos. We've talked before. I was really looking for you to come up and do something."

He sat there. He was in tears when he was telling the story. I'm getting choked up as I'm telling you this story.

But that sometimes is how we live out our Catholic faith. We look from a distance. We don't want to get involved, because we're afraid of getting involved. And in today's world, where we have the Good Samaritan laws, where if you go through and do something and someone gets hurt because of what you've done, you can now be sued. We're afraid of being that Good Samaritan nowadays. We're afraid of lending a hand.

I remember the first time I had this realization, in my own mind, it was my first job. I was 12 years old. I was riding my bike -- back when I rode bikes -- I was riding my bike to church, because I was the assistant groundskeeper, aka weed specialist. (Laughing.) I could pull weeds. That was my job for the summer, making 7.50 an hour. Now, given this was 20 years ago, 7.50 an hour for a kid, that was a lot of money.

So I was riding my bike and I saw this elderly man. Saw this old 85 year old man pushing his lawnmower, just really struggling with it. I stopped on my bike and I looked and I said, "If he's still there when I come back, I'll help." And I rode my bike along. I agonized that -- about that all day.

In fact, I remember it 20 years later, he tells me I should have pulled over and done something about it. I had the ability, as a teenager -- almost teenager, to go forward and do something for my fellow man. But I didn't want it to inconvenience me. I didn't want to put forth that extra motivation because I was going to be late for work.

Now, given the priest I worked with, he would have been "Yeah, fine, whatever." But I was afraid of what it would cost me to be that Good Samaritan.

My brothers and sisters, we must not be afraid. As Pope St. John Paul, II, tells us, time and time again, and he quoted scripture, "Be not afraid, be bold, be courageous."

That's what it takes for us to combat the evil of sin in the world today, to be one family of Christ, bound together, with one mission and one goal, and that is eternal life. We can't get there on our own. And we've been told that, time and time again. You cannot earn your own salvation. Salvation comes only through our Lord Jesus Christ.

But we can be better people. We can love one another, more and more, each and every day. And it doesn't start with others, it starts with us.

It's easy for us to point the finger and say "You did this wrong! You did this wrong! You did this wrong!"

It's hard for us, though, to accept that we did things wrong, too. Because many times that's all we're doing, we're blaming ourselves. We're looking at our weaknesses only. We've allowed ourselves to define ourselves by our weaknesses. We say, "I'm bad at this, I'm bad at that, I'm bad at this, I'm bad at that; therefore, I am a bad person" Right? "Incapable of this or that because I don't have all of the gifts, talents and skills that so and so does."

Instead of watering the grass around us, we continue to look at the grass as being greener on the other side of the bridge.

My brothers and sisters, we are called, as members of the Body of Christ, to water the gifts that he has given to us. Because he's planted those seeds within us. We're called, then, to water them, to nurture them, to nourish them, to allow them to bare good fruits.

But that's not just our own lives. It's in the lives of not just our faith community here at St. Roberts, or the life of the church. Kate Rae being baptized into the parish of St. Robert Bellarmine, to be baptized at the parish of St. Robert Bellarmine, to be a member of the Body of Christ. That body that has over a billion people in the world. That's what she's going in to.

But we then have to let her, and all of our young people know, that they aren't doing it alone. They have the faith and the support of all of us here, of all of the Body of Christ. Because there is going to be times when she's going to go through life and it's going to be really, really hard. Think back to your own childhood. The bad parts. The parts where you didn't know where to turn. The parts where mom and dad didn't really have the answer that you needed.

Because you're not always going to have the answers for her. You're not going to be perfect.

That's not something to get bogged down in. That's something to accept, and try to figure out, "If I don't have the answer, where can we go to find that support?"

Well, first, we're going to go to Him. Everyone has to have that relationship with Him. As I said before, there is two things in homiletics they say do not ever say in a homily: "must" and "have." "You have to do this!" "You must do this!"

No, my brothers and sisters, we must have a relationship with the Body of Christ because if we don't, we have submitted to sin. The only thing that gives us that power to combat sin is that relationship with Jesus Christ. That when you get upset with your children, and they get upset with you, the only thing to help you in that conversation is not just you talking, believe me. "Those doors will come of hinges." (Laughing) That's what it was at my house.

The concentration, that retreating, as Christ did, after he did miraculous things into the silence, to have that time of silent prayer and conversation with Our Lord.

We talk about holy hours in the church, we talk about having adoration with God. It scares some of us to sit in silence. You guys know, I'm an extrovert. If you didn't, SURPRISE! Silence for me is one of the most difficult things in my life. Because there's so many things going on, in my everyday world. Despite having the three places that I'm assigned to, I have a life of my own, as well. I have a family of my own -- not my own family, but you know what I mean. And so there is always something going on and going on, and going. And it's so hard to distract myself with life by God and to God.

A couple of weeks ago, I mentioned that some of the priests in our diocese, Father Brian and Farther Carson, our former priest over here, had just finished this Exodus 90 program. Well, they brought it up

again this last weekend. And I said, "No, not gonna do it." Felt like the Church Lady, "Not gonna do it. Not gonna do it." (Laughing) Memories of Dana Carvey comes to mind, "Not gonna do it." Maybe it was George Bush. Anyway. Dana Carvey. (Inaudible conversation.) She's right.

But in that, we have a talk, it was the last talk -- it was the men's conference talk -- where there was a talk about the difference between men and boys. And I got hit in the heart, time and time and time again. Because I realized, for myself, I've been a great spiritual big brother to you guys here, but I've been a horrible spiritual father. And I want to apologize for that.

I haven't led you, as a father should. I've been a friend, as a big brother, that always wants to look out and protect you, which is good, but that's not enough.

And so I was told by God, very concretely, even though I don't want to do this program, I need to do this program. If not for me, for you.

So when that program starts on January 21st, I'll be miserable for the next 90 days. (Laughing) But you won't know it. You may know it. (Laughing.)

Most of you know, my goal is to not show it. Why? Because Christ tells us when we are in fasting, when we are in prayer, don't let anybody know about it. Because we shouldn't look gloomy and "Oh, my gosh, I had to go to the gym again today."

"Father, it's only day two."

"I know." (Laughing.)

But if it's about a discipline, taking all of those things in my life that I, as a man, allow myself to become attached to and say "I'm putting these by the wayside. It has no more power over me. I choose Christ first."

Because until I work on myself, I can only be a spiritual big brother. And that's not what you need. As a pastor, my right and responsibility here is not to be a big brother, but is to be a father, to make those hard decisions, to bear the weight of those hard decisions. I found out the hardest part of being a priest is to make a decision and then to receive all of the flack for that decision.

But that's my responsibility as a priest. I haven't done that well enough, so again, I apologize for not being a good spiritual father these last two-and-a-half years. But I do ask for your prayers for these next hundred days, because it starts, as I said, January 21st.

The great thing is that that 90 days ends at Easter. So Lent is the halfway period. So when you guys are just starting your Lent, the giving up chocolate, and caffeine, I'll say, "(Chuckling) I haven't had it for four-and-a-half weeks -- actually six weeks by that time." Six weeks. All right. (Laughing.)

The point of all this isn't to say, "Hey, look at me." No, it's to say, "Hey, look at us." Because we are the Body of Christ, but it starts with each and every one of us accepting our responsibility as being members of the Body of Christ. That yes, there are rights that come to us because we are members of His Body, there are also responsibilities. We are being called to tasks, my brothers and sisters, to stop being apathetic, to stop going through the motions, saying, "Yes, I'm Catholic. I go to church every once in a while. I pray every once in a while. It's been three or four years since my last confession, but yeah, I'm Catholic."

If you're going to be Catholic, be courageously Catholic. I remember the first time that I prayed in public, as a teenager, by myself, went out for the first time to a Burger King -- yes, I know I went to Burger King -- and I went there and I sat and I (indistinct mumbling.) That was prayer before meals. Because it wasn't that I was afraid of people seeing me as Catholic, I just didn't want to be looked at. Try doing that as a Priest. It's hard.

Let's be courageous as Catholics, my brothers and sisters. Let's be courageous as mothers and fathers, sons and daughters of God. Because we can help raise -- (Parishioner sneezes.) Bless you. Literally, bless you.

We can help raise Kate Rae, in a faith community that loves her, a faith community that then loves each and every one of us here.

I've been told, time and time again, by visitors that come here, they love our community here at St. Roberts. Why? Because they feel welcome and it's a small community, to be honest. A small community that's welcoming. We know when we have visitors here. We know when one of our neighbors isn't sitting next to us. The reality, though, is how many of us, when we realize a neighbor isn't sitting next to us, gives them a call after mass and says, "Hey, where you at? Hey, I missed you. Hey, is everybody doing okay? Can I help out in any way, shape, or form? Does father need to come out and anoint you?" Because sometimes that's a reality.

Let us begin to care for one another, so we can be a Body of Christ worthy enough for this little girl to become a part of, because that's what it's about, my brothers and sisters, us being one family in Christ, embracing the love of God, but also taking on those rights, those roles, and those responsibilities. (Homily concluded.)