

About six months ago or so I was standing out in the south narthex after a Sunday morning mass as the congregation departed. As I did so, I noticed Susan (not her real name), a woman who had volunteered here at the parish, crying as she left. I asked, “Hey, What’s the matter?” She paused and started talking to me about her daughter who was having problems. But what she said next stung. Susan said that she had been coming to mass for many weeks, and she couldn’t help crying – but that nobody had ever asked her why? She felt all alone in her sadness. She had hoped someone would ask her about it.

In our Gospel we hear about Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist. Today is the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. This feast marks a transition: the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of Ordinary Time. Jesus’ baptism is also the beginning of His public ministry. Thirty years after being born in Bethlehem, and after many years of obscurity in Nazareth, Jesus is now at last ready to begin to act,

to preach, to do the signs and wonders revealing Himself as the Messiah bringing God's message of salvation and love to the world.

Today, on this Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, I want to preach about how we're also called to make that transition: to be more public and outward focused in our own faith in Jesus. I want to come back to Susan. It must be five years now since I changed the way we begin mass at Holy Family. I'm talking about how we now stand and introduce ourselves to those in our immediate vicinity at the beginning of mass. Remember, I told you this was difficult for me to do. I'm an introvert and have always opposed that kind of thing, but I'd come to the conclusion it's needed today. Catholicism isn't a private religion. It's not just about me and Jesus. By my own baptism I'm called to have a public ministry, just as Jesus modelled for us. My own growth in holiness will require me to show charity to those who need it. We're all called to bring the life of Jesus to others in some way. My hope in instituting the greeting before mass was that this could be an easy place for all of us to

begin to do that. I hope that we would start to notice and interact with the people who sit around us each week.

So, how's that going? Ask yourself, "Do I know the names of the people who sit around me?" If not, introduce yourself again right after mass. Don't waste time. Next, "Have I learned anything about any of those people beyond their name?" And, "Would I know if someone new was sitting by me – or someone who was hurting?"

Why are such questions and knowledge important? Because Jesus wants us to reach out to the people we worship with, the people who are fellow members of the Body of Christ – with Susan. Coming to a Catholic church can be a lonely experience. That's sad. It's not meant to be that way. If someone is new, ask them about where they're from. Invite them to the Café. Introduce yourself and welcome them. If they're regulars, but seem sad or upset, ask them why. Don't be afraid to reach out – you are a baptized Christian. You are called to this public ministry, and you can do it.

There are a couple of reasons we might hesitate, why Susan might have gone so long without being comforted. First, there's fear and embarrassment. We don't want to be told, "Butt out." What if I'm not wanted? Second, there is also the wish to avoid getting entangled in someone else's life. It might get awkward or take too much of our time!

Public ministry is a little risky, but are either of those possible outcomes really so bad compared to the good we might accomplish for Jesus, as well as for the person next to us? If a person doesn't want to share what's on his or her heart, that's fine. Silently say a prayer for the person and move on. And as for getting entangled in someone else's life, happiness comes when we engage in other people's lives, not when we protect every second of our own. Public ministry helps our own spiritual lives as much as anyone else's

I mentioned Susan at the beginning of the homily, but there are also other experiences of Holy Family. Let me finish with two quotes about us from social media I read the past couple weeks. A man posted

on Facebook, “When I chose to renew my covenant with the Lord . . . I was blessed to live near HFK parish . . . There’s a spiritual vitality, a presence of the Holy Spirit at HFK I have not experienced elsewhere.”

And then I received this e-mail a few days ago. “I have been blessed to visit Holy Family a second time this year . . . I’ve lived abroad and travelled the world . . . though the mass is the same, the welcome varies . . . the family of Holy Family demonstrates ‘family’ in all they do by their genuine welcome everywhere I went – be it at mass, meetings, Simbang Gabi, caroling or Bible Study – to their willingness to add to the family. Thank you . . . people of Holy Family.”

From these two people to Susan, it matters to others, and it matters to Jesus, how, and if, we live out our baptism. We can do it well – or not. But it matters. Let us love one another here and take that faith and love out there into the world. It’s necessary if we’re to grow in Christ. And the world needs the charity of Jesus even more than we do.