

Solemnity of Baptism of the Lord
Good Shepherd Parish- Message Series: "Baggage"
January 12/ 2020

Introduction:

This is the first week of our first series for 2020. The New Year always brings the desire for a fresh start...a new beginning. We feel a sense of optimism that we can make progress and improve...Every New Year we make resolutions to eat better, exercise more, reduce debt, accomplish ambitious goals at work and spend more family time at home.

Even if you didn't make a New Year's resolution you are probably hoping that 2020 will be better than 2019. You have some hopes and dreams for the year ahead. You want to see progress. No one is planning for 2020 to be worse than 2019. There is something in the human spirit that shapes the desire in us that the future can be better than the past. But implementing these good things can be difficult for us...it's hard to make a fresh start particularly when we haven't dealt with something negative in our past...there are people you know, as do I, who just can't let go of something in the past...some sort of hang-up or mistake...and sometimes these grudges can prevent us from moving forward toward our resolutions and toward where God desires us to be...This new series is about dealing with the past...acknowledging our past regrets and clearing out resentment or feelings of guilt or baggage so that we have the grace to move forward and embracing in this new year all that God wants from us. Essentially what we're talking about today is forgiveness: In other words, to cancel a debt; whether it's to forgive another person or even to forgive oneself.

Unforgiveness is a big thing in people's lives: in various forms of prayer ministries some people ask for specific prayers...b/c they feel they are stuck spiritually; and sometimes intercessors identify that there are blocks that prevent us from growing spiritually...one of the most common spiritual blocks if you will, is unforgiveness...that there is some knot/ or baggage

that we're holding onto that is preventing us from loving God more and loving our neighbor more...identifying and acknowledging that block or w/e it is key to moving forward...

Baptism of Forgiveness:

In today's Gospel we celebrate the Baptism of Jesus: John the Baptist was the last prophet, paving the way for the Messiah Jesus...and he was using the full-immersion baptism to help people in a process of Repentance (to give ppl a tangible way of saying sorry to God) and a chance to begin again...we know that Jesus had no sins and so He didn't need to repent/ say sorry to God the Father; so He had no need to be baptized...and yet He is at the river and standing in line...even John the Baptist refuses to go through with it as we see in our Gospel today...but in Jesus being baptized, He shows us the path to salvation/ to Heaven: as one saint said: in being baptized Jesus isn't sanctified/ blessed by the water but rather He sanctifies/ blesses the water for us...Jesus saves us from suffering by suffering Himself; He conquers death by dying Himself; and He overcomes sin by living among sinners; Jesus teaches us what to do...and He teaches us to forgive: we recall when He is on the Cross and how he prays for His persecutors: "Father forgive them, for they know not what they are doing"...Jesus teaches us to imitate Him but we know that do really forgive as Jesus does is not easy!

Stages of Forgiveness:

In this message series over the next couple of weeks, we'll be going through the baggage we have in our lives: and this may have many forms/ or stages:...for example, we might be in denial: that 1) we makes excuses; that the harm didn't matter even though it did; or the harm wasn't a big deal (even though it was); the other type of denial is refusing to forgive; saying it's unforgiveable; which leads to bitterness and evolves to hatred or revenge; another stage or form of baggage might be that we'd admit that forgiveness is needed but you haven't got around to it

yet; maybe you've been replaying the scenario in your head and rehearsing the conversation but just haven't done it yet; it becomes something that is put off...or the third stage that maybe we've experienced before: of just going off and doing it: entering into the awkwardness and cancelling the debt by forgiving someone or asking for forgiveness...

Personal experience

Seminary: retreat master asking us to close our eyes + picture the person that just irks you right now...one person you just can't get along with or bothers you...and he said as you picture this person in your mind, know that God desires you to be in Heaven with that person! A hard truth to accept but a truthful one nonetheless...

So as we kick this series and the new year off...consider who is someone you have to forgive? A parent? Sibling? Boss? Former spouse? Current spouse? Yourself? Name the person and in Jesus' Holy Name, rebuke any unforgiveness and the courage to say sorry...to reconcile. Our hope for this series is that you would honestly come to recognize your need to forgive and to be forgiven...Baptism is all about wiping away original sin but of course the effects of it remain...Baptism reminds us that we are all sons and daughters of God and that we are all sinners...we all need forgiveness and we all need to give it too: and as we journey over the next few weeks, let's remember that forgiving someone won't change the past but it can change the future. And that forgiving someone might not change the other person, but it will change you.

Praise be Jesus Christ now and forever! AMEN.