

# HOMILY ~ THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

## JANUARY 11/12, 2025

A couple of years ago, I was in Cancun near the ocean; and I thought I would be able to see some sunsets. When I got there, I realized that the beach was facing east, so there was no sunset; but there would be a sunrise. I decided to get up at 6:00 am to see it. I had no expectations because I never made a point of seeing the sunrise before. I got out to the beach while it was still dark, and there was hardly anyone out there. I guess people do not like to get up at 6:00 am on vacation. I experienced the most spectacular sunrise, and it was a surprise. It was an overwhelming experience. I had a sense of the immensity of the universe; and I felt very small, but I knew that God loved me personally. I had an overwhelming sense of God's presence. How this whole thing happened was a mystery. Science can give us some explanation, but that explanation was inadequate. God created all of this, and God sustains all of this as he sustains my life every day.

This experience was different from many of the sunset experiences because at many of the sunsets, there are so many people around chatting. Some of the people are spending most of their time taking pictures and looking at the pictures on their phone. It is very tempting to take pictures, but that little picture on your phone does not begin to capture the experience. I think to have a God experience maybe you have to be surprised by it and totally enter into the experience without distractions; and it must be something beyond explanation. There must be some mystery.

I think some of the people in the Gospel reading today had a God experience. The heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove and a voice came from heaven saying, "*You are my beloved Son; with whom I am well pleased.*" Well, that would have certainly been unexpected, it could not be explained and there was some mystery; and for those who were paying attention and were not distracted, they probably had a God experience. There were also probably people who were chatting, not paying any attention to Jesus and just missed the experience.

When I was in seminary and went to the Holy Land, I was hoping to have some God experiences; and I did, but generally, not when I expected them. I was kind of planning to have a God experience when I went to the Jordan, the place where Jesus was baptized. We brought swimsuits so we could be totally immersed just

as Jesus was. When we got there, the water was very shallow. There were so many people there, some of them were wading out into the water and it was up to their knees. The water was very murky and kind of green. It looked really filthy. I was not even going to get my feet wet, let alone be immersed in the water. We brought bottles with us. We were going to fill them with the water from the Jordan, bring them back home and do baptisms with the water. There was no way I was going to take that polluted water. Some of the guys did, and we were amazed at what grew in the water over the next couple of weeks. I did have God experiences, but not necessarily at the holy sites. It was being in the places where Jesus was and walking the roads that he would have walked.

I do not think we can plan God experiences, and we do not have to travel to particular sites; we just have to be open to them. We can have them at home. For years, I am up every morning at 6:00 am praying in the sunroom at the rectory. During the winter, it is still dark at 6:00 am so I close the blinds. Several years ago, I opened the blinds and experienced this incredible sunrise. I missed so many because I kept my blinds closed. I have had very few sunrises so far this year because it has been too cloudy. When I get one, it is a surprise.

I have a huge Christmas cactus that is probably 40 years old. This year when it bloomed I really noticed how beautiful it is. How does it know to bloom at Christmas time, and how does it bloom at all? I mean I water it and make sure it gets sunlight, but I do not give it life or make it bloom. It is a mystery. God created it, gave it life and sustains it. Science provides some answers, but we will never understand this totally. I find evidence of God's existence all around me every day. I try to be attentive to it. We have so many distractions, and our phones are a big part of the distraction. If we find something that we cannot explain, we try Googling it right away; and who even knows if that explanation is correct.

Sometimes I think we just need to sit with the mystery. You can have God experiences right here at home. You just have to be attentive and open to them.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim