

Session #6:
Encountering the Author of the Sacraments
John 3: 1-8

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. He came to Jesus at night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you are doing unless God is with him."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."

Nicodemus said to him, "How can a person once grown old be born again? Surely he cannot reenter his mother's womb and be born again, can he?"

Jesus answered, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.

What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit.

Do not be amazed that I told you, 'You must be born from above.'

The wind blows where it wills, and you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

We have journeyed together for six weeks.

Some came aboard more recently!

Some went on vacation during the course of our time!

But we have journeyed nonetheless.

The purpose of our exploration was to answer the question "Why Catholic?"

"Why are we here?"

"Why do we get entangled in this Catholic Church of ours?"

I suppose precisely because it is *ours*.

I suppose because *She* is our mother.

And She is ours, and She is our mother, for, in Her – sometimes seemingly despite Her, we find the One who draws us and loves us, sharing Himself with us.

In the Church, and only in the Church,

- we experience these special gestures of Jesus we call Sacraments.
- we experience *the* gestures of Jesus we call the Eucharist.

For myself, I know—in retrospect—that my personal journey led me to the Church
because of the Eucharist, and all the intelligence that surrounds this gift.

My upbringing was nominally Catholic.

But I had little real sense of who Christ was,

 although I now know he was mysteriously and faithfully at work.

It was not until college that I really became aware of Christ.

Prompted by need, after much struggling with questions of identity,

and, shall we call them, stupid “extra-curricular activities” (no details!),

at the encouragement of friend who is now an evangelical minister,

I made a personal commitment to Christ – *and so much changed*.

The pull to unhealthy behaviors subsided.

I felt *liberated* and *peaceful* and *happy*.

That turning point, that *conversion* testifies to the importance of *our choice*.

Christ is at work in *every* human heart.

But He will not invade the sanctuary of human freedom.

And so, He only goes so far without an invitation to go further.

Jesus must be *invited*.

Such is love: *respectful* and *reciprocal*.

We have been introduced into a love relationship with Christ, at His wonderful initiative.

If so, our responsibility is that of *responding with desire*.

Each one of us has been born again.

We have been flooded with the gift of grace.

We are indwelt by, and are thus temples of, the Holy Spirit.

But we do not always think to *choose*, to *invite*.

We do not always think to *choose*, to *invite* Christ, to invite the Holy Spirit.

Saint Paul says in Romans (8:14):

“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.”

-- which is really awesome, because it means that *He* does the work!

Well, there is some effort (!), but *He* makes it possible.

As we say in one of the preface prayers at Mass,

“Our desire to please you is itself *your* gift.”

At certain moments in our life,

special opportunities arise to choose, to invite.

This evening, in a very simple way, we have an opportunity.

Our days, in fact, ought be “punctuated” by what we do here:

we pause to *acknowledge* and *surrender*.

Several times throughout the day, for just a moment, we ought to

pause to adore and surrender.

“Lord, you are present, and love me personally with everlasting love.

love greater than any fear or worry I may have.

I give myself to you.”

The simple gesture that we propose, for those who wish, is to come forward,
if and when you feel moved to do so, to pour a measure of water in the font,
praying the words that you see close to the font
(or perhaps another prayer that arises in your heart):

“Lord, I pour my life into Yours. May I be reborn in You.”

If you prefer not to come forward,

please engage the Lord in intimacy in whatever way seems fitting.

And, all of us, let us please carry our Brothers and Sisters in our prayer,

asking for a shower of healing mercy upon them.

Those who wish, in addition to the gesture at the font,

may approach either myself or two of our facilitators, Mary Barbera and Leo Rudegair,

for an imposition of hands, as we ask for a fresh outpouring of Holy Spirit,

the Comforter, who gives us the peace of Christ.

“Come Holy Spirit, fill your beloved child with your gifts.”

When, all who wish to do so have come forward,

we will close with a hymn and final prayer.

Let us know that the Lord is present.

A shower of healing mercy indeed is falling...