

Homily for April 23, 2006  
Second Sunday of Easter (B cycle)

By Father Charles Bowes

Acts 4:32-35  
Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24  
1 John 5:1-6  
John 20:19-31

## *Water we associate with Jesus lets us triumph over death.*

Did you get wet during the rite of sprinkling, reminding us of our baptism? Did the water fall like rain? Did it surprise you? Infuriate you? Make you ask, “What are they doing now?” Did you take your glasses off to spare yourself having to clean them?

Water causes life and death – with it we live, without it we die. Too much of it kills and devastates, as attested to by the hurricanes and tsunamis of too recent memory. We associate it with Jesus’ passage through death to life. That’s what makes us design churches with fonts for immersion near the main entrance, and what makes us have little holy water fonts at the doors of older churches – we make the sign of the cross after touching the water or when the thrown water touches us – all reminders of the burial and birth we undergo at baptism and the power of that association with the risen Jesus.

I learned about the power of water in our faith the hard way, as a newly ordained deacon, my first day serving as a chaplain at a large community hospital. Late that night, I was summoned to the room of a mother whose baby had been stillborn a few hours earlier. “We want our baby baptized,” the young couple stated. The mother cradled the lifeless body of their daughter. “Her name is Nicole.”

I panicked. I knew what to do, but I just didn’t know what to say. In order to buy some time, I asked the couple to meet me in the chapel a few minutes later. In my overwhelmed state, I tried to call the wise priest who was my mentor for that summer, hoping he would take over or at least tell me what I might say... but he was unavailable. So, I was on my own. As nervous and inexperienced as I was, I tried to think of what words to use with those grieving parents.

When the couple arrived, I realized my words would be inadequate. Instead, and almost without realizing it, I took a tissue, wiped at the tears in the eyes of the parents, then wiped my own tears and touched the tissue to the baby’s head.

“Nicole, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

I said nothing else – the tears were more eloquent than any words. The water spoke more profoundly than anything I could have said.

As I look back after all these years of using water in the rituals of the church – all the baptisms and blessings and Easters and funerals – that baptism of little Nicole remains for me a high point in my understanding of what water means to us in our prayer...its connection with life and death and with the risen Jesus and the hope and power it brings.

In the waters of baptism, we enter into the life of God – a God who loves us, who cries with us and for us,

who knows the pain and despair and anger we experience, because God has experienced it all Himself by being one of us. In baptism, we embrace the Spirit of God, and that Spirit embraces us as well – God the Creator and Father is present to us in all our tears and laughter, in all our struggles and triumphs, in our grief and joy. The Lord is truly risen, and in this faith we live.

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