

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

God speaks a powerful word to all generations when He speaks on the occasion of Jesus' baptism. Please put yourself in the scene, imagine yourself sitting there on the shore of the river. Jesus comes up out of the water. St. Matthew tells us, "the heavens opened and the Spirit of God descended in the form of a dove and rested upon him. Then a voice, the voice of God speaks softly, gently, yet powerfully and full of emotion, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." In other translations, Matthew, Mark, and Luke all have God speak, "This is my beloved Son. My favor rests on him."

Another word for favor is grace. God is saying that by his baptism, Jesus is full of grace, that is, favored by God, or in our way of talking, he is saying "This is my beloved Son, my favorite."

Now this is really important for us to understand because what God is saying of Jesus, he is saying to each of us, to all of us, who are baptized in Christ Jesus. When we were baptized, whether as an infant, a child, or an adult, we came to share in the Sonship of Jesus Christ. That is to say, each of became God's favorite child, beloved by Him.

Well, you may ask, how can we all be favorites? The short answer is because He is God and if He wants each and every one of us to be loved as His favorite child, who can dispute Him.

Let me ask you this! Did you ever get into a discussion with your sisters and brothers over who was the favorite child of your parents? Come on! 'fess up!

Once, in our youth, my sisters and I entered into heavy debate on the topic. My oldest sister, Margaret Mary, claimed she was the favorite because she was the oldest, the first born. Louise, my middle sister, would insist that she was the favorite because she was the smartest and always got the best grades in school. Gerri, my younger sister, said that she was the favorite because she was the baby of the family and she was the cutest. I, of course, knew I was the favorite because I was the only boy, the crown prince, if you will.

Well, eventually, we confronted our parents and insisted that they tell us who was their favorite. Dad laughed, rolled his eyes up in his head and said, "Don't be silly. You are all my favorite." Our Mother, however, seemed to take our discussion somewhat more seriously and seemed to be thinking hard about it. Finally, she said, "My favorite child is the one who needs me the most. The one who is sick. The one who is worried or heart-broken or sad. The one who is having a bad day. That is the child who is my favorite. It depends on which of you is struggling the most at any given time.

Now, my parents were great parents, and in both their answers to my sisters and me, I think that's what God is saying to us today as we celebrate Jesus' baptism and our own

baptisms. He laughs at us when we think that each of us can't be his favorite child, but then, wants to show us that when we are going through our greatest challenges and difficulties, he is always there for us; he is always in it with us.

Understand this, by your baptism in Christ Jesus, you are favored. You are one of God's favorites. And just because God has many favorites, that is no reason at all for you to conclude that you are not special. God is, after all, God. And our all-powerful God can have as many favorites as he desires. Rejoice in the knowledge that you are one of them.

Please take this word to heart. I see so many people—good, good people—who don't accept the fact that they are good. I see so many people so terribly effected by all the negative forces around them who don't believe in their own goodness, their own generous hearts, their own lovability. There are too many of us who get down on ourselves because we aren't perfect people. We see all the flaws and weaknesses in ourselves and we convince ourselves that we are unloved even by God Himself.

This is the work of the Evil One, the enemy of our human nature, who is offended by the delight that God takes in us. He wants to convince us to be filled with self-loathing and poor self-esteem, the better to lure us away from the God of our salvation.

This is surely not the way God intended it to be. What does God intend? Put yourself back in the scene of today's Gospel. Hear once again the words of God breaking out from the heavens and speaking down through the centuries to each one of us: "You are my beloved son. You are my precious daughter. Each and every one of us is my favorite child."

Children, have the courage to count yourselves as God's favorite. God's favor surely rests on you. Wake up to that very positive and encouraging reality. Now, start living your Baptism in Christ with joy and excitement and exaltation. That is God's gift to you and You are God's gift to your world.