

Each year, when we celebrate this Feast of the Baptism of Jesus, it's important to remind ourselves that *his* baptism was not the same as *ours*. Jesus wasn't baptized as an infant, as most of us were. His was not a baptism for the cleansing of sin, as was ours. And yet, in spite of these major differences, there is a point of connection between the two: it has to do with identity and mission.

Being, identified or defined, is something very important in our world today – always has been. In the corporate world, it's called image-making; corporations are defined by their logos. And individuals are defined by their accomplishments. Michael Jordan is defined by his celebrity status as a great basketball player. Madonna is defined by her videos. Donald Trump is defined by his wealth and his women. Historically, there have been many examples: Alexander earned the title "the Great" because he was such an extraordinary military leader. There was: Ivan, the Terrible; William, the conqueror; Lorenzo, the Magnificent; Richard, the Lion-Hearted; John, the Baptizer; and, we can't leave out Hagar, the Horrible.

In today's gospel, Jesus is identified or defined at his baptism: "You are my beloved Son," the voice from heaven says. The same thing happens in our baptism. Our baptism defines us *publicly* in relationship to God, and to one another. It identifies and defines us as a child of God. We are reminded of this each time we enter and leave church – as we dip our hand in the holy water – in the baptismal font, or a mini-version of it – we renew

our sense of baptism it's a reminder that we belong to God – that we belong to God publicly, committedly, openly. We have a mission to make this world holy by our holy lives. We are God's beloved son, and beloved daughter, in a most profound sense. That is our foundational definition and identity.

There's not a day goes by that we are not challenged in this identity. We are bombarded with a million other images that challenge us: "Why don't you be like this?" or "You should be like that. *This* is the current 'look,' the current 'in' image. The motto of most advertising is: "You have an inadequate or poor image; and we can make you over. We can make you look and be the way you ought to be." (Always for a price, of course.) They tell us that our main mission is not to be holy, and not to make the world holy; our main mission is to be beautiful, and to feel good about ourselves.

Jules Pfeiffer is a humorist who writes plays and draws satirical cartoons. He has a series of panels that goes like this. It's a boy named Danny talking. He says: "Ever since I was a little kid I didn't want to be me. I wanted to be like Billy Whittleton, and Billy Whittleton didn't even like me. I walked like he walked; I talked like he talked. I signed up for the same high school he signed up for, which was when Billy Whittleton changed. He began to hang around with Herbie Vanderman. He walked like Herbie Vanderman; he talked like Herbie Vanderman. And then it dawned on me that Herbie Vanderman walked and talked like Joey Hamerlin. And Joey Hamerlin walked and talked like Corky Fabinson. So here I am, walking and talking like Billy Whittleton's imitation of Herbie

Vanderman's version of Joey Hamerlin trying to walk and talk like Corky Fabinson.

And who do think Corky Fabinson is always walking and talking like? Of all people, dopey Kenny Wellington – that little pest who walks and talks like me!”

God has made each of us unique – the way he wants us to be. In baptism he has re-created each of us into his beloved son or beloved daughter. In baptism, we are touched by the Spirit, affirmed in our identity, dignity and mission, and loved by God for all eternity. Our challenge is to forget about what everybody else says, and to listen to what God says: “You are my beloved; with you I am well pleased.”