

29TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
CELEBRATION OF THE BAPTISM OF JESSE ANDREW CUNNINGHAM

Archbishop Peter Sartain
St. Teresa of Calcutta Parish
October 20, 2018

This afternoon, I have the rare privilege of Baptizing Jesse Andrew Cunningham. I have probably baptized thousands of people in my 40 years of priesthood, but no baptism is routine; each and every one is a rare privilege because of the gift of salvation that God gives to each child, who is his beloved son or daughter, the apple of his eye. By his own choice, and simply out of love, God gives the gift of salvation to the one being baptized and sets him or her on the right path - the only path - that is, the path to heaven in discipleship of the Savior, Jesus.

If you don't mind, I'd like to address my homily to Jesse Andrew. I've tried to make my words simple enough for Fr. Frank to understand, so they should be pretty easy for Jesse, too.

My message?

Simply that God loves you, that he will be with you and within you through every transition life brings your way; and that the Church will always be here to welcome you with open arms. We need you, because your gifts and talents have been given to you for the good of the Church and humankind. You also need the Church, the Body of Christ! You need the food that only Jesus gives.

I hope you will always see the Church as the place to share your joys and seek comfort and guidance in time of trial. I believe with all my heart that God wants us to know him, to be his intimate friend, and to share his life. The very fact that he has sent his son, Jesus, as the Way, Truth and Life - as Savior of the World - is a sign of his infinite love and his desire to be one with us. Strive with all your heart to know Jesus,

to follow him, and to stay on his Way in the Church. I know from personal experience that he is worthy of our trust.

Nurture in your heart a conscious and deliberate commitment to basic human respect. After God, people must come first. Spend time with your family. Pay close attention to the little things in the lives of others. Console the friend who hurts. Slow down to listen to the one who needs to talk. Notice the newcomers in your midst and make them feel welcome.

Always take the high road. Be big enough to forgive, to let go of grudges. Be the first to extend a hand in friendship, the last to judge. Learn compassion, be agents of reconciliation. Read the newspaper, and first notice the faces and names of people, not the statistics.

Pray to God with your whole heart, casting your life into his hands with brave surrender. Make it your goal not just to know God, but to know him better. Not just to love God, but to love him more. Not just to believe, but to believe with even greater conviction. Not just to be nice to others, but to love them selflessly as Jesus, to give yourself sacrificially in and with Jesus.

Be patient. Many people, by acting impulsively, have brought needless suffering to themselves and others. A good night's sleep, a heart-to-heart conversation with a friend, several deep breaths, and a fervent prayer will help today's troubles lose their power to frighten.

Always see yourself as a beloved creature of God, a "work in progress" about whom God cares deeply. Abba John, an early Christian monk, liked to say, "A house is not built by beginning at the top and working down. You must begin with the foundations in order to reach the top." You are a beautiful work of God. Only he makes your foundation strong.

When you are at fault, ask forgiveness. I wonder how many of us carry on our shoulders burdens which would be lifted quickly if only we would lift up our heads and confess our sins. There is not one among us who has never had the need to admit wrongdoing and make a fresh start. Practice saying, "I'm sorry," to those you offend and especially to God, whose mercy heals, strengthens, and transforms us.

Give thanks. Thank God, who gave you life and sustains your every breath. Even if you think of yourself as weak in faith, that does not change the fact that God has done everything for you. When you get older, thank your parents, your principals, your teachers, your coaches, your co-workers, the men and women who keep your workplace clean. They, and many others like them, will do more favors for you than you can possibly imagine. They will make your life much easier than it would otherwise be. The truth is: we're in this together, and by helping each other, serving each other, we make the world a better place because we are doing it all for Jesus.

That is Jesus' teaching to James and John, who asked him for the privilege of sitting at his right and his left in his Kingdom. They were asking for human privilege, for human honors. But Jesus told them to have a different perspective. In so many words, he said, "Aspire to great things, have high hopes, set high goals for yourself. But never forget that the road to greatness is not paved with lots of trophies and accolades and applause. Rather the road to greatness is paved with self-sacrifice, love care for others, looking for opportunities to serve as I have served, to give your life as I have given my life."

Jesse Andrew, never let go of Jesus' hand, and never think that you can find true happiness and fulfillment along any other Way but his. Never forget, Jesse Andrew, that the Lord Jesus, your Savior and Lord, did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. How can you and I, his disciples, do any less?

