

Bishop Jaime Soto – Homily for the  
Feast of SS. Philip and James Parish Church, Lourdes, France  
May 3, 2010

Paul reminds us of what has been handed down to us (1 Cor. 15.1-8). He says that this is the message of “first importance”, the central message that saves us: “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.”

The appearance to Cephas (Simon Peter) and the Twelve is not an inconsequential, narrative detail. The risen Jesus returned to the company of his friends with the risen humanity that divinely shone with healing grace. The death and resurrection of Jesus was more than a fact. It was personal encounter. Each of the apostles would meet the Lord. Thomas, one of the twelve, would touch, probe and then profess, “My Lord and My God.” This is the substance of our Catholic tradition, the witness to the saving, healing power of the crucified Christ who has been raised from the dead.

This apostolic testimony brought all of us into the shimmering waters of baptism. Water – all by itself -- is miraculous. It is a cause for much wonder. Those from Southern California wonder how to get it from the North. Those from Northern California wonder how to keep it from the South.

The existence of water is a wonder, a strange substance that exists only between a limited range of temperatures before it becomes either solid ice or a vaporous gas. Under these limited, precarious conditions also survives our own species. Our wonder of water has created mythic metaphors of a vast formless sea upon which the wind of the spirit hovered in the first moments of creation. The waters of the flood drowned a world lost in abominations while at the same time buoying the fragile ark and the God’s first covenant with humanity. Moses and the people hurried over dry land under the shadow of the cresting waves of the Red Sea, held back by God’s hand. Once on shore, Moses would turn to see the waters of the Red Sea crush Pharaoh’s fearsome army in its teeming tidal swirl. The frightful power of Egypt’s chariots splintered into lifeless wreckage on the shore while Moses and the people stood stunned by the swiftness of God’s mighty mercy.

Jesus came out of the River Jordan, refreshed from the Spirit’s anointing flowing over him while the Father’s voice stirred his soul.

A witness caught with horror the moment the soldier’s lance pierced the side of the Christ and water mixed with blood poured down the cross to stir into life the soul of the Church. Peter would plunge himself into the water after he recognized the Risen Christ calling to him from the seashore.

These are the mystical waters into which baptism has plunged us, body and soul. We are submerged into the fundamental mystery, the mystery of first importance. The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus is what charges the saving waters of baptism

with the holy, healing flow of the Spirit. Bernadette began that baptismal pilgrimage here in the sacred fount of this Church. The sacramental sound from that spiritual pool ripples still in the giddy gurgle of Lourdes's grotto spring. The Virgin Mary's message to Bernadette was an invitation to plunge more deeply into the baptismal mysteries of repentance, renewal, and healing.

As we savor these remaining days in Lourdes, let us keep crystal clear the light of first importance that shimmers on the holy waters of this place. By his wounds we are healed. By his rising we are restored. This is the marvelous mystery that make miraculous the water of Lourdes, the waters of baptism, and even the simple, solemn gesture of blessing oneself with water we enter a Church to meet the Lord again.

Holy Mary, mother of God, St. Bernadette, SS. Philip, James and all the apostles, help us know the healing hand of Christ and the feel the sanctifying flow of the Spirit. Soak us in the saving fountain of faith and make us glad witnesses of his mercy. AMEN.