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of the City of Heppner and the County of Morrow

Heppner

GAZETTE-TIMES

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For Letters to the Editor: Letters to the Editor MUST be signed by the author. The Heppner GT will not publish unsigned letters. All letters MUST include the author's address and phone number for use by the GT office. The GT reserves the right to edit letters. The GT is not responsible for accuracy of statements made in letters. Any letters expressing thanks will be placed in the classifieds under "Card of Thanks" at a cost of \$10.

Spiritually Speaking

You are my beloved son

By Fr. Thankachan Joseph SDB, St. Patrick Church

At some time or other, all of us need to affirm our identity and in turn be affirmed by others. We prefer to identify ourselves with those who are well known, influential and powerful. Jesus, however, preferred to be identified with the poor, the weak, the marginalized and outcasts of society. While we long to be affirmed by others, do we long to be affirmed by God himself? May His Word confront, as well as affirm, us.

This passage from Isaiah, 42: 1-4, 6-7, written about five hundred years before the birth of Christ narrates the prophecy of God's beloved servant, His chosen one, endowed with His spirit. The prophet is primarily referring to Israel as the chosen one of God. Israel is reminded of its universal mission to be the servant for all nations. In spite of their desperate situation, they will be an instrument of salvation for all peoples. They will not dominate but will fulfill their mission by humble service. This mission looks impossible, humanly speaking, but will be realized in Jesus Christ the new Israel, the Chosen One of God.

The Acts of the Apostles 10: 34-36 narrates the scene of Peter declaring to the Roman official Cornelius that before Jesus's public ministry, God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power to overcome sin and human illnesses. The context of Peter's address is the uncertainty in the early church about the following of the Law of Moses, the dietary laws and their observance and the

stipulations of the law with regard to contacts and relationship with the gentiles. Peter himself was hesitant to give up Jewish eating practices and was unsure about how he should relate to gentiles until he had a vision in which he was led to the house of Cornelius. There he openly proclaims that God has no favorites but that anybody of any nationality who believes in God is acceptable to Him. He also reminds his listeners that Jesus was the anointed servant of God who went about doing good, curing all who had fallen under the power of the evil one. The surprise of Peter was even greater when he discovered that as he preached to the pagan household of Cornelius, the Holy Spirit descended on them.

The most important events in the life of Jesus as narrated by all four Gospels are the baptism of Jesus in River Jordan, the first public revelation of all Three Persons in the Holy Trinity, and the official revelation to the world of Jesus as the Son of God, which also marks the beginning of Jesus's public ministry. All four Gospels record that Jesus's being baptized by John posed a difficulty for the early church, given the fact that Jesus was sinless. John himself was hesitant to baptize Jesus. However, the fact that His baptism is reported in all four Gospel accounts testifies to its authenticity. Jesus did not need to be baptized by John, but in choosing to be baptized, He symbolized His readiness to be one with humanity, in solidarity with the human race. It was as though Jesus was proclaiming: "I am one with you! I am on your side!"

The Gospel narration from Mark (1:7-11) tells us that at the moment of Christ's submission to God's will, the moment He accepted to be one with humanity with its weakness and sinfulness, Jesus was accepting all the consequences: becoming the lamb of God ready to be sacrificed for the sins of the world. This moment of acceptance also became the moment when the Father acknowledged His son. He gave His sign of recognition and approval. "No sooner had he come up out of the water than he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit like a dove descending on him. And a voice came from the heavens 'You are my son, the beloved; my favor rests on you.'" The baptism of Jesus thus becomes a moment of oneness of Jesus with the human race, with God also proclaiming His oneness with His own Son. "You are my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." This affirmation was accompanied with signs: the heavens parting, God revealing himself through the descent of the Spirit and through His own words spoken to all who cared to listen and believe. The Servant of God is also the well-beloved Son of the Father. In life, all of us need to be affirmed and the most meaningful affirmation comes from those who love us.

As the Spirit descended on Jesus at His baptism, it confirmed Him not only for that moment but remained with Him, anointing and strengthening Him all through His life. The same Spirit, which is given to us at baptism, remains with us to strengthen us right through life. For Jesus, His baptism signaled the end of His hidden life and the beginning of His public ministry. It had taken thirty years of hidden life to prepare Him for it. For us, baptism must not be a one-time experience of infancy, but a growing realization as we advance in years of who we are called to be by our Christian vocation: servants of God and beloved sons and daughters of the Father. The Gospel narration of the day ends with this phrase "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased," beautiful words of the heavenly Father. If I want to be addressed in the same way, what things of this world do I need to get rid of in order to be a favorite one in the sight of God? May we believe the Father affirming us: "You are my beloved.... My favor rests on you!"



Fr. Thankachan Joseph

Health Department hires new director



Nazario Rivera, 29, of Hermiston is the new director of the Morrow County Health Department (public health). He was formerly employed at Good Shepherd Hospital in Hermiston.

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