

Father O'Connor's Homily for 11 January 2026
Feast of the Baptism of the Lord-A

Isaiah 42: 1-4, 6-7
Acts of the Apostles 10: 34-38
Matthew 3: 13-17

People sometimes write letters to God. And once in a while they are compiled for other people to read. Some of these letters can be amusing, while others can be thought-provoking.

A little girl wrote this letter: "Dear God, did you really intend for giraffes to look like that, or was it an accident?"

A man wrote that when he would meet God at the end of his life, he wanted to stand before God, with one cancer cell in his hand, and ask God, "Why? Why?"

I suspect that a number of us have quarreled with God from time to time. "God, why are you acting this way? Why don't you do this instead?" Someone said that so many of us have a continuing "revised standard version" of what we expect God to be like. And the versions that we compose are very much about us: what we would do if we were God.

Someone was complaining at great length to Father Benedict Groeschel about their unhappiness with God and His ways. And after they had worn down, Father Benedict responded, "You know, you missed your calling. You should have been God!"

The Scriptures warn us that it is idolatry to attempt to create God in our image and likeness, and forget that we are made in God's image and likeness. For God's ways are not always our ways, and God's thoughts are not always our thoughts. That is why the Scriptures are always putting before us who God is and what God is like. And we don't always like that.

The Old Testament prophet, Isaiah, in the First Reading for the Baptism of the Lord, prophesies about what the Messiah would be like when He came into the world. Isaiah writes, "Thus says the Lord: Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased. Upon whom I have put my spirit. He shall bring forth justice to the nations."

We can think, when we hear about justice, that, well, I am already just. I treat everyone fairly. Nothing for me to work on here. It is all those other people who need to get with the program."

And Isaiah cautions us, “Don’t be so quick to excuse yourself. We are all ‘a bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench, until he establishes justice on the earth.’”

The Son of God was baptized in the Jordan River by his cousin, John the Baptist, taking the burden of our sins on His shoulders, and He would carry them to His cross and die to set us free from our sins. And at Jesus’ baptism, “a voice came from the heavens, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.’” Maybe, though, the One whom the Father found pleasing is sometimes different from our expectations. Yet, this is who God is and what God is like.

A woman went to visit one of her former college theology professors. She and her husband were very proud of their daughter, Kate. They were hoping to have more children, but their one-and-only was seven. Then she tells her teacher, “And now, after all this waiting, we are expecting.”

She then adds, “And we know two things about our baby. Our baby is a boy, and he has a disability.” The professor then thought of that passage from Isaiah, “A bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench.” And he silently prayed, “Lord, please give these good parents the strength they will need to persevere.”

A few months later the professor received a Christmas card, and in it was a letter that this former student had sent to her correspondents: “After nine long months of unmitigated challenges, the magic moment had come. Timothy Andrew took his first breath and let out a hearty yell. He was whisked off to the neo-natal intensive care unit where he spent the next three days before coming home. He is strong, alert and beautiful. He daily shatters our former images and fears of ‘special needs.’ He may need special help, but already he is no slouch in giving special love. We are truly blessed.

“Kate, our eight-year-old, is Tim’s champion. Having concerns about how Tim might be accepted by other kids, she informed the kids on our block, ‘My brother has special needs, and everybody is going to play nice with him, or else!’

“One evening we heard Kate talking to him. ‘I am so glad that you are here, Timothy. I will always love you. I will always be nearby.’”

The Scriptures today remind us that God’s ways are not always our ways, and God’s thoughts are not always our thoughts. And, thanks be to God, that God is God and that we are not.

For “a bruised reed he shall not break, and a smoldering wick he shall not quench, until he establishes justice on the earth.” God’s version of justice, that is. And for the world.