

## The Fifth Sunday of Easter + May 22, 2011

How many of you watched the Royal Wedding? Britt and I taped it and watched the next day and I think the day after that and maybe one other time. We loved it. You must understand that in our family we have a fondness for things British and Anglican, so to see the wedding for members of English royalty in Westminster Cathedral was an amazing delight. One of the things about this wedding that caught our attention was the wardrobe. We took particular notice of what people were wearing. You could tell who the clergy were. The Archbishop was decked out in the best cope and wore his distinctive miter. The other clergy wore fancy copes as well. The bride was distinguished by her lovely gown and long train. Prince William, the groom, wore his princely attire. So did Charles and Philip and Harry. I'm not sure what all those medals they wore meant but it was impressive to say the least. The Queen wore what I thought was a most appropriate Easter dress. And then there were the hats. I think that was most curious piece of all. Some of the most interesting and peculiar looking hats I believe I have ever seen. I learned something new in watching the Royal Wedding. Apparently you no longer have to wear a hat on the top of your head. It looks like the trend is to wear hats on ones forehead!

In watching the wedding you got to see who was who. Clothes were the distinguishing mark, weren't they? You knew, just by looking, who was royal and who was not.

Today our six confirmation students are distinguished by a certain kind of wardrobe. Did you notice? They each wear a red cloak reminiscent of the Holy Spirit and with a symbol of the Bethlehem logo. A token of their confirmation. Beneath these special cloaks each of them is wearing a white robe. What does this white robe proclaim? It is not a graduation gown because no one here is graduating. Nor are they fashion statements. The white gown like this white gown and the white gown worn by the acolytes and the assistants all points to the same thing. They are symbols of baptism. Symbols of the Resurrection and garments of new life. Now, how might we distinguish who is who. Who are the royal ones? The princes and princesses and kings and queens? Well, if we were really purists about this all of us here who are baptized would be wearing white robes. For the royal ones are not a special class of people set apart from the rest of society. All of us are set apart! Our common baptism is the sign and the symbol that God has washed us and traced the sign of the Cross on our foreheads. And we are set apart for service.

You can't say it any better than our second lesson today from 1 Peter: ***You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness and into his marvelous light.***

How awesome it is to know that you are royalty, not because you're set apart by pedigree or status but because God has freely chosen you, washed you, claimed you and has set you apart for service ... we are chosen, says First Peter, in order that we might proclaim the mighty acts of the one who has led us from darkness to light!

The practice of wearing white robes goes back centuries and we are restoring that practice so that when a child or adult is baptized we give them such a robe as a symbol of their new life in Christ. Way back in the early centuries of the church men and women would emerge from the waters dripping wet and some cases wear their robe for days. St. Augustine, the great bishop and teacher of the church, would run his Catechumenate this way: the newly baptized were given their white robes on the night of the Easter Vigil and come to church the next day wearing and them and come to church each and every day following Easter wearing their robes and he would instruct them about the great mysteries of the faith. About eight days later they would take off their robes and would then mix in with the rest of the congregation. There was a special rite for the disrobing and Augustine described it as infant birds flying from their nest ... "Today the infants mix with the faithful – as if flying out of their nest. It is necessary that we birth-laborers address them. As you know, brother and sisters, when young swallows ... begin to fly out of the nest, their mother flaps around them noisily and, with dutiful chirpings, testify to danger their children face." Now, that they would assume greater responsibility as Christians he knew how easy it would be for them to maybe lose their way or forget the way of Jesus or even abandon the church.

Now we don't want that to happen and to you six confirmands we don't want that to happen! So, not just today but in the weeks and years to come your mentors, family members and others in the church community will act like mother birds flapping around you noisily with dutiful chirpings. After today you won't be wearing this baptismal robe but after today you will wear your baptismal garment in your heart. For your Baptism proclaims that you have been clothed in Christ. And Christ is your daily garment that you wear wherever you go.

Today you say "Yes" to your Baptism. Today you make promises to be part of the church, to worship, to serve Christ, to tell the good news, to strive for peace and justice. While today you make those vows publicly and formally, you are being charged to live out those vows and say yes to your baptism every day. You have been clothed in Christ. Christ is the robe you wear each day.

You are royalty. Chosen and claimed by God and set apart to serve and love all people in the manner and likeness of Jesus. To wear Christ each day makes a difference. By living out your baptism, you are set apart and commissioned to do nothing less than change the world.

Now, we may not always believe that. Jesus, in our Gospel reading today, goes so far to say that we will do greater works than him. Wow! That requires tremendous faith to believe that, but if we remember that following Jesus doesn't require

perfection it isn't all that hard to believe. For you see, God gave you the Spirit in your Baptism and today we summon that Spirit again as you are prayed for and anointed. There is a power at work in you and us beyond our comprehension. We're called to receive it, to trust it, to live in it and to enjoy it.

Way back in the fourth century there was a prisoner in Egypt named Pachomius. Today he is a beloved saint in the Coptic Church. He worked as a slave in the Roman army. While waiting to be deported to a work site he sat in prison and the Christians would come and give him and other prisoner's food and drink. They were most generous and caring. Pachomius was so impressed, so moved by their witness, so astounded that these people would be merciful to strangers that it led to his conversion. You see it was their generous hospitality and care for the poor that set them apart. It was their response to the neighbor in need that set these Christians apart. Pachomius, so moved and attracted to their witness, became a Christian himself.

That is what we've been set apart in baptism to be about. And today as you say "Yes" to your Baptism, this is the kind of life to which you want to say "yes." You will, without a doubt, receive other messages about what true life looks like. There will be a lot of pressure to have you believe that real living is about becoming rich or successful or the strongest or the smartest. But these are lies. Do not trust them. What they promise may seem cool on the surface but what they promise is an illusion. You are called – we are called – to be clothed in Christ ... to befriend the lost, to serve the poor, to reconcile enemies, to practice forgiveness, to love your neighbors. And we all struggle with how to sort these things out in life, but here's the good news to remember and to which you may return again and again. Your status or worth does not depend upon winning anything. You are loved as you are ... just as you are. And when you forget the way and ask, along with Philip in our Gospel reading today, "Show us the way?" - remember again the promise of Jesus: I am the way, the truth and the life. Come back again and again to the source of unconditional love so and discover there again true freedom and the joy of living out your baptism.

For you are – we are – a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people in order that you may proclaim the acts of him who called you out of darkness into light. Amen.