

The Ascension, Basil the Great, the day after James of Jerusalem, and St. John the Evangelist. There's a pretty diverse group of folk! And, of course, an event in the life of Jesus. They span 1700 years and a good chunk of western civilization.

On this day what's important about them? Here's a clue: June 3, June 14, October 24, December 27.

Something happened on those days – and mostly only the people to whom it happened remember it – which, in our church, is a problem because they're anniversaries that we tend not to remember.

Every Sunday I invite thanksgivings at the beginning of each service; they vary quite a bit, don't they?! There's a constant thread, though: birthdays, and anniversaries – which usually means wedding anniversaries.

So now you know that these dates are anniversaries, but not wedding anniversaries or birthdays. So who are the people that celebrate these days: In order of date: Fletcher, Myself, Fletcher, Bill, Amy.

Anyone want to guess what's important about those dates – what anniversary they celebrate?

You've heard me say that it's wasn't odd for an Englishman to be ordained on St. Patrick's Day, March 17, because Patrick was English, so it can't be my ordination!

For each of us that was the date we were baptized.

Why am I bringing this up now. The clergy team had a long conversation on Wednesday about how we should remember important liturgical days in peoples' lives – I'll mention what brought it up in just a moment.

We felt we do a good job with birthdays and wedding anniversaries. The church, in general, does a good job of remembering ordination dates. But we do an abysmally poor job of remembering the dates of our baptisms.

Now you might ask “why is that a problem?” Here's the answer: because baptism is the fundamental rite of commissioning for every Christian. It doesn't matter if some of us baptized are subsequently further commissioned for specific and limited support ministries – which is mostly what ordination is about, baptism underpins that further commissioning, and the ministries that come from it are essentially delegated from the community that is the baptized.

Another early name for that community of the baptized is a Greek one: *Laos*. It generally meant: “a people, group, tribe or nation; all those who are of the same stock and language”. In other words, it meant **everyone**. When *Laos* was used of the early Church it meant “The People of God”. And where Christians were concerned, it also meant **everyone**. I really need to underscore this: *Laos* isn't qualified: it isn't “some of the People of God”, or “the non-ordained People of

God". It means, simply, "The People of God". All of us.

And what word do we get from *Laos*? "Laity". What does it mean to say "I'm a lay person". Well let's look at medicine – I remember when I was in my last parish talking to someone who'd had a meeting with his doctor about a medical condition – he reported what the doctor said, then said that he didn't understand anything of what the doctor said! And he explained that failure to understand like this: "I'm just a lay person when it comes to medical matters".

"Just a lay person". In that context it cries amateur, inexperienced, non-professional, untrained.

So here me when I say this: there's no such thing as "just a lay person" when it comes to Christian faith: "Laypersons R Us" – all of us. We became lay persons the day we were baptized, and we've never stopped being lay persons, any of us – me, and Fletcher, and Amy and Bill, and Tom, and Mary, and Dave, and Julie, and Bill included.

I'm saying all this for two reasons:

1. Your clergy team would like all of you to find out when your baptisms were, if possible, and celebrate them every year as a reminder of the day when you were embraced by God into the fellowship of all believers, blessed with the gift of the Holy spirit, and commissioned for your life-long identity as ministers of Christ. We your clergy have begun doing just that.
2. The second reason is that by proclaiming the primacy of the commissioning of baptism we are freed to celebrate other commissionings without in any way claiming the superiority of those commissionings over baptism.

So here are two more dates: December 16 and yesterday, June 16, the celebration of 18<sup>th</sup> Century Bishops George Berkeley & Joseph Butler. Each was also a 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration, the first for Fletcher Davis' and the second for Bill Burnett's ordination as a priest! In the context of what I've said, both of these two events are worthy of note and celebration.

So greet Fletcher today (a little late). For Bill we'll have to do this a little differently – Bill doesn't leave his house much any more, and can't handle crowds. But we can send him a note to tell him on his auspicious day that we remembered. Thus you'll find a certificate in Campbell Hall and you're invited to sign it, and also, if you wish, write a brief note.

Which brings us back to the fundamental point I'm making today – we're all ministers of Christ. So in light of your identity as ministers of Christ, and to paraphrase the words of an early blessing: Now go into the world in Peace. Be strong and of good courage. Hold fast to that which is good; love and serve the Lord with gladness and singleness of heart, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit. Amen.