

Baptism of our Lord ©

Paddy and Mick were the best of buddies. Paddy was an ardent churchgoer but Mick wasn't at all gospel greedy. When Mick passed away the family laid him out in his swankiest suit, stylish collar and tie and the shiniest of shoes. He was a sight to behold. When Paddy saw him in the mortuary he muttered under his breath. Ah, poor old Mick, all dressed up and nowhere to go.

One thing which our Catholic faith does is to give us a reason to live good religious lives in this present world, as the second reading says. If our belief in the catholic religion is wearing thin, we may be struggling to make sense of a host of faith-related issues. I know people these days feel more at home with the word 'spiritual' but 'spiritual' could mean anything, even worshipping trees or all this New Age stuff, whereas 'religious' has much more resonance about it.

I notice on December 21st this year about 5000 people gathered at Stonehenge to witness the sunrise. They were sort of worshipping the rising Sun which is a throw-back to pagan times. But when believers celebrate the feast of the Resurrection of Christ, a mega feast in the Christian calendar, most of the Stonehenge people are nowhere to be seen. They are probably tucked up in their beds.

At Easter we worship a real living person come back from the Dead and present with us at this and every Mass. The people at Stonehenge are making a God out of the rising Sun peering through a cluster of oversized stones. What's going on here?

I don't think having no religious faith is as cool as it used be. Why deprive ourselves spiritually. At our baptism we apply all the power of Christ's death and resurrection to our souls. When parents delay baptism for their children until they are old enough to decide for themselves, are they not depriving them

of the merits of Christ's death and Resurrection which is power over sin, resisting the Devil and his temptations and securing a place for us in Eternal Life, a place which the good Lord promised to reserve for us. What more could Christ have done for us. Why deprive children of these merits.

St Paul, in the Second reading today, advises us to give up everything which does not lead to God – all our worldly desires, and have no ambition except to 'do good'.

John, the Baptist is a good example of this. The sole purpose of his life and ministry was pointing the way towards Christ, the source of all goodness. He never took his eyes off the target. He said: "the person coming after me is the important one and I am not fit to undo his sandal strap'. He must increase and I must decrease". John ended up in prison and gave his life for Christ. All his energies were directed towards preparing the way for Jesus. Perhaps we could take a leaf out of his book.

Today let us thank God for the unmerited grace of our baptism and entrust our lives and destinies solely to Him. He must increase, we must decrease.