

## **Baptism of Hugo (Trinity 4)**

What a great Gospel reading for a Baptism – the fear of drowning! You may have heard this story before - when I went on my first (and last) school cruise aboard SS Uganda (the sister ship to SS Nevasa). When we went through the Bay of Biscay in a Force 9 gale, I really did think I was going to drown! So being such a religious young boy, I held on to anything which didn't move and sang out very loudly lots of stirring hymns – and the good Lord must have heard my cries, because I am still here to tell the tale! It was truly terrifying so much so that today's Gospel reminder makes me feel somewhat queasy!

And yet there is that eternal, life-affirming message: that the Lord of the winds and seas not only protects us but leads us like the best of navigators and, kindest of captains'.

But let's stay with that baptismal image of drowning for a moment. It is about dying to the darkness of sin and then re-emerging, rising up again through the waters or waves to glimpse - as if for the first time, Resurrection light. I remember seeing a Baptism in Greece – the child was naked, and then plunged deep under water before being raised up again by the Orthodox priest solemnly to represent the dying and rising of Christ. I was shocked because (I thought) we are very tame in the C of E, by comparison. And then the dazed child had oil rubbed all over him, the scented, olive oil of baptism. The symbolism was lavish, dramatic, but I have remembered it to this day. The sacrament of baptism is a sacrament for that very reason which is why the water and oil is blessed and made holy; why the mark of the cross is imprinted on the child's forehead and hands – and so this signing marks him out as starting on his Christian journey. Hugo sets sail, if you will, and goes out to sea because the Lord has called him out by name and with calm, gentle, authority. There is no place for fear in the Christian story but only God's grace and generosity, God's friendship and encouragement.

And that's why parents need the support and prayers of their godparents to extend that *family* support and encourage children to come to church, where all of us have been adopted by Christ, where all of us belong to the same body, with Christ at Her head. It is through these Sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist – at the font and altar- that Christ gives himself to us unconditionally because He can and always will. “Even the wind and sea obey him.”

The call of each and every Baptism is the call to follow Christ. So it is our collective responsibility as the people of God in this place to reach out for new candidates, new punters, new children to be baptised joyfully: in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

While our political activists are proud to show their respective colours and affiliations by putting leaflets through our letter boxes... perhaps as Christian activists, we should do something similar. Surely we can promote why the Church is here, why Baptism is free and why it matters, and what we hope for in our Christian belonging and pilgrimage with Christ at the helm – not for a few years but for the rest of our lives. The Gospel isn't like a Manifesto which is rarely read or remembered. The Gospel speaks for our today and tomorrow, our Beginning and our End: Alpha and Omega. Basil the Great put it like this: “We share in the grace of Christ and are called ‘children of light’ and ‘sharers in the eternal glory’. To put it simply, we are filled with all the blessings not only of this age but of the age that is to come. We can observe as in a mirror, as though already present, the grace of the good things which are in store for us in the future, the enjoyment of which we receive now through faith. If the pledge is of this order, how wonderful must be its perfection! If the first fruits are so rich, how great must be the consummation!”

Hugo, this is your big Baptism day when unbeknown to you yet, and known to your witnesses a little more, God loves you into growth. We have no idea whether you will be the next Prime Minister or the

next CEO of Suffolk Digital or, P&O! We do know that today God has already implanted his life into yours and cherishes your uniqueness -which is why we pray that, like those first disciples in the stormy boat, Christ will be your every strength and stay, your Light and, Salvation.

Amen.