

Fr. Romeo Evangelista Homily
Sunday, January 9, 2022
Baptism of the Lord
Cycle C

When Cambodian refugees moved back into their country from the refugee camps on the Thai border in the early 1990s, many chose to come back on the trucks provided by the United Nations. Many others, however, led by the Venerable Maha Ghosananda, one of the most respected Cambodian spiritual leaders of all time, decided to walk. They walked from the camps in the north, all the four-hundred-kilometer-way to Phnom Penh (the Capital) and beyond. This was a Dhammayietra---a journey of peace-- the great Ghosananda declared.

Imagine the scene this group of monks and pilgrims would behold at every town. Villagers would line the roads, in tears, wailing, awaiting the monks whom they had not seen for years. From 1975 to 1979, the genocidal Khmer Rouge--a name given to communist party members- killed about two million Cambodians, among whom were tens of thousands of Buddhist monks. Now, here they were, a few who had survived, coming back into Cambodia on foot, blessing everyone along the way.

As with most Cambodian blessings are not unlike our own, there was water. Villagers poured water on the hot bare feet of the pilgrims, and in turn, the monks poured water on the heads of all who sought their blessing. Thus began the washing away of tears and bloodstains from the decades of violence and death they had endured. With water began the cleansing necessary for people to be freed from their terrible dark past of torture, killing fields, and war.

As we remember today the baptism of our Lord, a moment that marked the beginning of the great washing away of sins of humanity and the rebirth of humankind, we pray to be cleansed from all stains of sins and selfishness. From the stains Covid-19 left upon us- sickness, pain, death, social injustice, and loss. We pray today that, by the fire of God's love that touches the healing waters of this earth, we may also be cleansed and renewed once again.

Our world needs a lot of cleansing and renewal. But this cleansing and renewal starts from each of us. That is why as we recall our own baptism may we all be inspired in our mission in renewing the face of our world. So that our Loving Father would also say to us, "with you I am well pleased."

Amen