

# Landry: In Baptism, we're God's number one draft pick



No one will ever mistake me for an elite athlete.

While I enjoy playing and watching many sports, I've never been particularly good at any of them. This is part of what made playing sports in school such a trial for me – especially when we chose teams by drafting them. If you don't remember team drafts from your school days, the process is simple: two captains select, one at a time, from the remaining pool of players to make up their respective teams.

Sports team captains usually look at two things when drafting members of their team. While individual captains may weigh these differently, both are usually taken into consideration as each pick is made. First, they look to the skills in the pool of players available to them: the biggest, strongest, fastest, and most experienced. Second, they look after their friends – ensuring that those whom they are closest to are saved the embarrassment of being picked last.

If you have the misfortune of being among the last chosen, it means that your peers value neither your abilities nor your friendship. It leaves you feeling a sense of failure (because you're not good enough) and rejection (because you're not popular enough).

This stinging feeling is not reserved for the schoolyard. In the 2011 NHL All-Star game, they adopted a draft format, and there was so much concern about hurt feelings that Phil Kessel was given a new car and \$20,000 to be given to

the charity of his choice for being the last one selected in the draft. But there's no such incentive for being last when you're in elementary school.

This might be part of the reason that one of my favorite passages from the Gospel comes when Jesus says: "You did not choose me, but I chose you" (John 15:16). It echoes a theme found throughout the Old Testament; God doesn't choose people for the same reasons we do, like our merit, abilities, or even a pre-existing relationship.

When the prophet Samuel was sent to Jesse's house to anoint the future King of Israel, God told him to look beyond the qualities Samuel assumed would make for a good king: "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

In short, when you contrast this the "drafting" of a sports team with the way God chooses us, you're left with a distinctive difference – and it's about far more than simply helping us feel good about ourselves. It points to one of the significant effects of the Sacrament of Baptism: "The fruit of Baptism, or Baptismal grace, is a rich reality that includes the forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins, birth into the new life by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit" (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1279, emphasis mine).

While we talk often about what it means to be a child of God, the idea that we have been adopted may catch a few readers off guard. We are not naturally the children of God: we are creatures, created in God's image and likeness, but creatures nonetheless. By Baptism, we are elevated beyond what we are naturally – and the negative impact of sin and the fall – to a supernatural dignity we can't reach on our own. You might say whatever it is we lack in skills and in relationship, Christ has chosen us anyway.

In his homily for the feast of the Baptism of the Lord, Bishop Robert Barron put this beautifully: "Baptism is the sacramental ratification, the sacramental sign of that choice, and by choice here I mean Christ's choice of you, not your choice of Him."

This understanding of Baptism begins to explain why we're so quick to bring infants to Baptism, rather than waiting for our children to reach the age of reason and to "choose" faith for themselves. Among the graces Baptism opens us to is this dignity of being a child of God, though it doesn't force us to stay in relationship with the Father. We can read clearly in the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) how free we are to leave the Father's house and even to lose our inheritance. But even then, we remain His sons and daughters, and He will wait to celebrate us home. This is because, in spite of our creatureliness and our shortcomings, God wants us on His team ... and He doesn't wait until the end to pick us.

"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." – 1 John 3:1

*– Mike Landry is chaplain to Evergreen Catholic Schools west of Edmonton, and serves as an occasional guest speaker and music minister in communities across Western Canada. Mike and his wife Jennifer live in Stony Plain, Alta. with their five children.*