

Bless This Child

God has blessed every child from the beginning of creation and the beginning of each created life. In as much as God became incarnate for us in the person of Jesus, God also awaits human hands however broken, wounded and inadequate, to give this blessing as affirmation of the original blessing already given. The first such hands are the skilled and waiting hands attending birth serving the purpose of putting the child into the sometimes uncertain but hopeful hands of the mother and father. At best the deepest desire of the parents are ones of compassion, however short they may fall from the mark.

These hands are extended into the curious and cautious but generally caring ones of the inner family circle – sisters, brothers, grandparents and close kin. The circle widens and hands diversify seeking to express along with the family something of that “first love” although in a second hand kind of way. Because of the imperfection of our human nature, this attempt at love in spite of the best efforts can never truly be first rate – yet, the blessing and this “first love” is a relationship that calls one into a life long quest in a journey towards home. (Henri Nouwen, *From Fear to Love: Lenten Reflections on the Prodigal Son*, Creative Communications for the Parish: 1999.)

This eternal blessing that is sought is ritualized in the Rite of Baptism as the Church itself opens up an even larger circle – the community of the Baptized. This is a circle that through the power of the Holy Spirit is already bathed in God’s “first love.” The Church offers its priestly hands to bless the water with this same Spirit and to bring the child through these waters of New Life. With oil previously consecrated by the bishop, the child is anointed and marked with a sign of the cross to be protected and marked as Christ own forever. The oil is a sign of God healing love that is always present and ready to be renewed in life’s perilous journey. It is also a sign of being consecrated for a royal priesthood to be lived out in God’s Kingdom and Reign on earth through a baptismal journey that lasts into all eternity.

Thus the baptismal journey is begun. Individuals and families come together through the waters of baptism to form a new family – a family of God to support, strengthen, and encourage each other on the journey. A journey that allows for the opening up to the fullness of the gifts given and ultimately leads towards an ever transfiguring likeness of the Risen Christ. While its true that persons of all ages – adults, infants, children and youth have their own schedules and timing for the formal beginning of this journey of faith, the norm for baptism in most liturgical churches remains to be infants and young children, and so it is to the families of these children that a special baptismal ministry might begin.

This is not to minimize the importance of adult baptism, but to lift up ways to bless and celebrate this particular time of family and parish life. This is but a beginning with the hopes that each parish will find its own pathway as they seek to expand this ministry of blessing the children in their midst. The task of parenting has always been an awesome task and perhaps even more so during confusing and turbulent times. While the Family of God – called the Church – has its own imperfections, it does contain a volume of grace to be shared through its scripture, sacraments and life together as community. It behooves the Church, therefore, to be present to parents in

shaping the lives of this next generation. What better time to begin than at the very beginning of life.

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