

This morning we will be baptizing Joshua Brian Bernichon. Joshua is just 3 months old so, as the case with most children, he will have Godparents as well as parents to oversee his spiritual development as he grows into Christ.

The first part of the baptismal service involves answering a series of questions and since Joshua is under the age of reason his parents and Godparents will answer for him. These questions are divided into two parts, the renunciations and the adherences. In the renunciations I ask the parents and godparents to renounce Satan, to renounce the evil powers of the world, and to renounce sinful desires. They are doing this on behalf of a little baby. It's hard to look at Joshua and imagine that anyone would need to address these issues on his behalf. It's not like he's had much time for sin, or that he is tainted with what is sometimes called "Original Sin" but more about that in a few moments when we look at our reading from Genesis that describes the "Fall" and its implications for all human beings.

Right now Joshua is the delight of his parents, he's a bundle of love, soft, and cuddly, only needing to eat and poop and sleep – so where is the potential for evil in that? Ok maybe those nights of sleep deprivation might change his parent's minds about the nature of evil but for the most part he is a delight. Right?

So why the renunciations on behalf of an innocent baby?

Some of this has to do with the nature of sin. Most of the time when we think about sin we think about personal transgressions, about rule-breaking. If you look at the 10 commandments you can see that they run the gamut from not giving God proper respect to messing with the lives of our neighbors. And while there are only 10 basic commandments we can extrapolate to any manner of transgressions from simple nastiness to horrendous evil and anywhere in between which leaves lots of room for all kinds of sins.

But that is not all there is to understand about sin and to delve more deeply we need to look at the example of Adam and Eve. There they were, God's first humans, tending a garden paradise, all their needs taken care of, living in harmony with the rest of creation and only asked to refrain from eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Enter the crafty serpent and you know what happens next. The serpent interrogates Eve in such a way that she decides to try to forbidden fruit, to reach for that knowledge of good and evil, to become like God; and in so doing brings Adam along with her. The knowledge of good and evil changes everything. Well it does doesn't it? Can you remember a time when you learned something that you would rather not have known? You can't undo that knowledge and you can't ignore it. The knowledge of good and evil changes relationships and behaviors and trust; it changes the way we view the whole world. The explosion of the #metoo movement that has revealed the bad behavior of so many of our celebrities is a prime example. People we admired, people we had crushes on, people who were powerful betrayed trust and abused those who were vulnerable. Ugh. Didn't we all want to go on believing that Bill Cosby was just the same as his TV personality Cliff Huxtable?

It's sad. So too for Adam and Eve who are now conscious of being naked – and shame enters the world. Naked? Do you really think God cared about Adam and Eve being naked? Behind the shame for their nakedness was the real shame that they had disobeyed God, that

they had mistrusted what God had told them for their own good and that they had betrayed God's trust in them. Adam and Eve had perverted the free-will that they had been given by their creator and for that there were consequences. Those consequences were not so much mortality, meaning death, because as mortal creatures they were bound to die but rather estrangement from the God who had created them in love, from each other, and from creation itself. Sin had entered the world. Such consequences are with us still, unfortunately we are not capable of setting things right by ourselves, we are all vulnerable to sin which becomes self-perpetuating. But do let me be clear, sin however pervasive, is not transmitted through physical birth it is omnipresent because we are not powerful enough by ourselves to avoid it.

John Westerhoff describes three kinds of evil that results in sin. The first is cosmic evil which is the hubris that leads us to believe that we can control nature and history, the creation of the atom bomb comes to mind here, but global warming, the pollution of the earth and air and ocean leading to natural disasters are all examples of such. We may not be directly responsible but in many ways we have benefited from the economic policies or practices that encouraged such destruction. The next is systemic evil which are the "isms" of the world. Those "isms" alienate us from each other and therefore from God. Most of us don't think of ourselves as actively participating in oppression but the social forces that have created the "isms" are very hard to avoid and even harder to combat. Right now the practice of separating children from their parents at the border is a prime example since it violates the humanity of human beings in need. Finally there is personal evil, the indulgences and greed that separate us from God and each other in ways that are the result of personal choice. Some are petty some are serious but in the end the result is the same, we miss the mark in our striving to do as God intended through rebellion and disobedience.

While young Joshua is too young to be actively participating in any of those it won't be long before life itself will pull him into this world that has been infected with sin.

Hence the need for baptism. When we baptize Joshua we are going to sprinkle him with water symbolizing Christ's death and burial and resurrection. This passage from life to death signifies new birth by the Holy Spirit, our understanding that Joshua is now cleansed from any taint of unforgiveable sin and claimed by Christ to become a part of the family of God joining with us in our hope for everlasting life. This doesn't mean that he can rest on his laurels...life in Christ requires commitment, a willingness to go beyond social norms, and sacrifice but a sacrifice not out of fear but out of joy and love. God gave us free will so that we could relate to God with love and in love.

In the adherences that follow the renunciations we affirm our faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ. By grace we have been given faith that we can trust Jesus' promise that we will not be condemned forever. The great gift of God is that through the Holy Spirit we will be able to follow Jesus as Lord – something we cannot do by ourselves. We can only grow into the full stature of Christ over time, by worshipping God in community, by participating in the breaking of the bread and the prayers, by repenting when we do fall into sin, by living our lives as models that proclaim who and whose we are, that Good news of God in Christ, by acting as if we see Christ in all persons, in our workplace, in our homes, in the world and yes, even right here, in church, and in striving to live in harmony with God, our neighbor, and with creation. It's a tall

order. Those evils that we renounce, they are seductive ...that's why it's helpful to reaffirm our baptismal covenant each time we witness a baptism. Of course when we make those promises we also admit that it is only with God's help that we can keep them.

So Joshua, you have your work cut out for you but as our prayer book tells us, Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble.

Congratulations and welcome!