

Saint Francis Solanus



JULY 2017

A Journey Closer to God: The Sacrament of Baptism

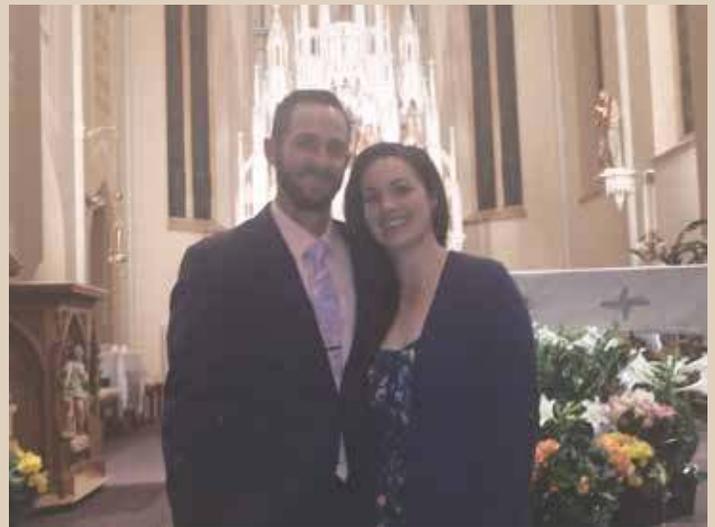
“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” These words are so simple – yet, they create one of the most powerful sentences in the world. What other words, along with water, can cleanse someone from sin, welcome them into the family of God, and open the door to all the other sacraments and the grace that God wishes to pour out through them?

“Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life,” the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us (CCC 1213). In other words, the Sacrament of Baptism is the foundation of a life of faith. The Church has always taught the necessity of Baptism for salvation – that is, welcome into heaven. Baptism is the first step in this journey towards eternity with our God.

“Baptism – it’s a cleansing moment and you definitely feel closer to God,” says new parishioner Adam Hightower, who was among those welcomed into the body of Christ when he was baptized this past Easter Vigil.

Raised outside of Kansas City in an “off and on” Baptist family, Adam had never really taken his faith seriously. A college baseball player at Quincy University, he met his wife, Daryle, who had become interested in the Catholic faith.

“She took classes on Catholicism and it sparked her interest in the Catholic Church,” Adam says. “I



Adam Hightower and his wife, Daryle, both received sacraments at the Easter Vigil this past year.

trusted her belief and faith, and I started that journey with her and then I grew into it myself.”

Adam and Daryle, who will celebrate three years of marriage this September, have a 2-year-old son, Leo. Daryle received the Sacraments of First Eucharist and Confirmation at the Easter Vigil.

For Adam, the yearlong Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults process, or RCIA, helped him to understand

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Good for the Giver

A simple riddle: If you don't give it away, you can't keep it. But if you give it away, it will increase.

The best answer to this riddle, if you haven't already guessed, is *love*. But the beauty of this paradox is that there can be a number of different answers. Another response might be *artistic talent*. Ask any artist, and they'll tell you that their skill for drawing or painting diminishes after a few weeks or months of inactivity. But the more they paint, the more their talent grows.

We also see this truth illustrated in nature. The Sea of Galilee, teeming with fish and other wildlife, is one example. All of the water in this beautiful reservoir is constantly being drained through the Jordan River, which stretches for about 60 miles, providing the only fresh water for all of Israel. It finally drains into the Dead Sea, which has no outlet. It is consequently stagnant and totally lifeless, continually evaporating into thin air.

The point, in a nutshell, is that the good steward takes care of his or her gifts by giving them away. As a result, you won't have less left over, but will instead have more!

There is a story about St. Teresa of Calcutta and her visit to one of the hundreds of convents she had founded. The Superior of the convent told her, "Mother, we don't have enough time to do our work with the poor; there's just not enough hours in the day." St. Teresa responded, "Then you need to pray more." When the convent added another full hour of prayer each day, they

somehow found that they had enough time to do even *more* for the poor in that city.

The difficulty with this idea – that by giving we receive – is that it is still a struggle to give. When we arrive at the moment of giving, it appears on the surface that we will have less left over. This is especially true regarding money. When writing a check to a charity or to the parish, you mathematically end up with less money to spend on other things. And yet, the immaterial value of our sacrifice is immeasurable. This is why Jesus speaks so frequently in the Gospels about the spiritual benefits of giving to others. We *do* have more after we give, but it is simply more of something else – and something better.

When we emphasize stewardship, it is not primarily to increase "volunteerism" or to swell our budget. Indeed, our first aim is always the "good of the giver." It is not because the parish has needs, *but because we have a need to give*. We recognize that the model Steward is Jesus, who gave *all*, even His very life, so that we may have everything.

Stewardship in Nature

The Sea of Galilee stays fresh and healthy because it "gives away" all its water through the Jordan River. When all that water is finally drained into the Dead Sea, it stays there, becoming stagnant and lifeless. Human beings are the same way. Giving of ourselves is one of the main ways we stay spiritually healthy.



A Letter From Our Pastor

We Are Blessed as a Church and a Nation

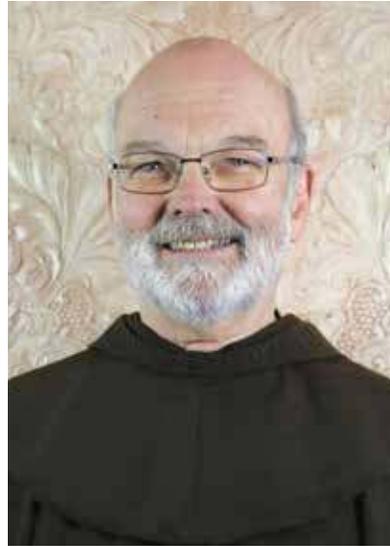
Dear Parishioners,

The month of July may seem like a bit of an “in-between” month. Of course, it sits in the middle of summer. During this last month of June, we shared in a number of solemnities and celebrations – these served to remind us of the incredible gifts we have received as Catholics, from the Holy Trinity to the Body and Blood of Christ.

Now, a look at the calendar shows us that all of the Sundays this month are in Ordinary Time. We know that Ordinary Time is anything but “ordinary,” even though it might seem that way – especially after a month of celebrations.

However, one thing happens this month that is certainly unique to us as Americans – Independence Day. We are Catholics, but we also are Americans, and we should be proud to be both – grateful for the gift of faith, and equally grateful for the gift of liberty we receive as American citizens.

Yet, to be Catholic and American should not mean choosing one over the other. These allegiances should be complementary. Our Catholic faith states that we need to work together as fellow citizens for the common good of everyone in this great country. Through the Constitution, our Founding Fathers guaranteed us of religious rights to contribute to our common life together.



Freedom is a special inheritance we have received, fought for by many at a great price, and it is a heritage that must be guarded – we are truly stewards of the gifts of freedom.

In 1886, just over 130 years ago, Bishop James Gibbons of Baltimore was made the second American Cardinal. He attributed the progress of the

Church in America to the “civil liberty we enjoy in our enlightened republic.” He continued to say that “in the genial atmosphere of liberty, the Church blossoms like a rose.”

July is not just a time for us to celebrate – it is also a time for us to blossom. It is not a time to cease praying or working to build the Kingdom of Christ. Rather, it is a time to work even more diligently to express our appreciation for our many gifts, and to share them with others. We are blessed – by the gifts of our faith and the gifts of freedom – and we must always remember to thank God for that.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Don, O.F.M." The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Fr. Don Blaeser, O.F.M.
Pastor

Reminding Young Moms

Though an extremely important and rewarding phase of life, the early years of motherhood can also be an isolating experience. Pulled in a hundred different directions each hour – and sometimes minute – by little ones in need of something, there is often little time to spare for oneself. That’s why community is so important, reminding young moms that they’re not alone in the journey and that there is a higher purpose to what might seem like menial tasks.

“I have four children who are all grown and married now,” says parishioner Jane Haas. “But when my kids were young, I took a break from teaching and was home with my children every day. Back then, I had an opportunity to be in a group with young moms that was started by an older woman. It was an opportunity for us to get together, meeting weekly, and sharing our struggles. Being with that group was truly a lifeline for me, my saving grace. It helped me build up a community while also growing spiritually.”

So, when Jane retired from teaching a few years ago, she felt called to provide a similar opportunity for young moms here at St. Francis Solanus – Young Moms Together. Gathering the first and third Tuesday of each month from 9-10:30 a.m., this ministry is designed to support and encourage young mothers in their vocation. This is done through food and fellowship, intercessory prayer, and Gospel reflections.

“The purpose is to create an opportunity for young moms to get together and to spend some time in prayer and spiritual reflection while also enjoying some coffee and fellowship,” Jane says. “The basic idea was to help moms get to know one another, build community, and feel more a part of the St. Francis family.”

Recognizing that it is often difficult for moms to leave their young children, Jane has organized the ministry to include the children. Young children are able to play together with donated toys and eat snacks while their mothers enjoy adult conversation and spiritual enrichment. For parishioner Sarah Venvertloh,



A Young Moms Together gathering – (from left) Krista Putman, Brandi Venvertloh, Sarah Venvertloh, and Emily Wellman.

That They Are Not Alone

mother of four, this is a particular blessing of the ministry.

“It’s such a gift to know that I can participate in a ministry without having to worry about who is going to take care of my kids or burdening anyone else,” Sarah says. “Jane always brings food and has created a safe place to be with your kids and visit. We moms are able to sit down and share about what has happened in each other’s lives over the past weeks. And then after that, we sit down and take the time to focus on the Word of Christ. It allows us each to be fed physically, spiritually and socially.”

Reflections are always on the upcoming Sunday’s Gospel, using material from *The Word Among Us*. This allows the members to reflect on Scripture, while better equipping them for Sunday’s liturgy, which may likely include distractions.

“It can be such a challenge to go to church with little ones,”

Jane says. “So, I really feel like this is my time to go and rest in the Word. Then, I can go to Mass that Sunday and feel more prepared. There is something really special, too, about coming together with a group of women who are in the same place in their lives. We’re all fighting the same battles, drowning in things like laundry. This has truly been such a positive thing in my life and brightens up my day.”

For Jane, that’s what the ministry is all about – reminding women that they aren’t alone and that they have an important place in our parish and Church.

“There are no requirements to join,” Jane says. “Women can come whenever possible and can bring their young children with them if they want to. And if your children are at school, you are welcome to come by yourself.”

Young Moms Together will resume their gatherings this September. We invite all young mothers to join us. For more information, please contact Jane Haas at either jfthaas@hotmail.com or 217-257-0533.



Some of the children enjoying a snack while their mothers gather for fellowship and spiritual enrichment.

*“We moms are able to sit down and share about what has happened in each other’s lives over the past weeks. And then after that, we sit down and take the time to focus on the Word of Christ. It allows us each to be fed physically, spiritually and socially.”
– Sarah Venvertloh*

The People God Chooses to Do His Will

Feast of Sts. Joachim and Anne – July 26

God raises up many saints for His Kingdom. The Father wishes to bring all men to Himself, and in order to do so, He calls all of us to do His will and to give ourselves for Him. In other words, God asks that we all strive to become saints. It was through people like you and me that the Lord brought salvation to a sinful world. He sent Christ to Earth to be born of a young Jewish girl and save humankind.

It is hard to imagine Mary as anything like “you and me.” For starters, she was sinless from conception, and she grew up to be the mother of our Savior. But let’s change gears for a second. Imagine yourself as St. Anne, Mary’s mother. Unlike Mary, St. Anne was not conceived without sin – but nevertheless, she would one day raise the Mother of God. That’s a pretty big deal!

What was it about St. Anne that prompted God to give her such a significant role in the history of salvation? There’s no way to know for sure, but there is one thing we can definitely say about St. Anne – God uses those who put themselves at His service, and that is precisely what St. Anne did.

Having grown up a Jew in Jerusalem, St. Anne married a shepherd named Joachim from Nazareth. According to tradition, the couple moved to Jerusalem and prospered in more ways than one. Their marriage was a strong one – blessed by God – and Joachim owned a large flock of sheep. As far as standards go, Anne and Joachim were pretty well-off. But after 20 years of marriage, the couple had no children.

They begged God for a child, year after year, and promised all the while that if the Lord would bless them with a baby, they would dedicate that child to



The Feast of Sts. Joachim and Anne is celebrated on July 26.

the Lord. But Anne and Joachim never became pregnant.

One day, Joachim went out to the hill country – it was a habit of his to speak with God in the wilderness. While he prayed, an angel appeared to Joachim and told him that Anne would conceive a child. He was instructed to name the baby Mary. The angel told Joachim that he and Anne were to dedicate Mary to God, because she would be “filled with the Holy Spirit even from her mother’s womb.”

Later, the angel appeared to Anne and told her the same. Joachim and Anne rejoiced at the news.

When Mary was finally born – after many years of frustration and infertility on her parents’ part – Joachim and Anne did just as they promised. They dedicated her to the Lord, and raised a holy woman who would mother

Christ Himself!

Although we do not know much more about St. Anne, we can assume that she was a very holy woman based upon the woman her daughter, Mary, grew to be. Anne was the one from whom Mary learned to be a mother. She was the one from whom Mary learned to serve God. She was the one who instilled in Mary the confidence and faith to say “yes” to God — “Be it done unto me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

There is no doubt that St. Anne was a humble, holy woman. She was given a great gift – a child – who she readily gave back to God. And, thanks to her faith-filled gratitude to God for His gift, Mary opened her heart to the will of God, and became the mother of Christ.

Talk about stewardship in action!

THE TRAITS OF THE CHRISTIAN STEWARD



Each day, we strive to live stewardship in our lives, recognizing our roles as “God’s co-workers” in His creative, redemptive and sanctifying work. But in our quest to live as disciples of Christ, many obstacles often arise.

One of the most prevalent roadblocks in living stewardship is understanding the traits that make up a good Christian steward. Surely, it would be much more convenient if we had some sort of “stewardship profiler” who could lay out the necessary steps to becoming a good steward, like on one of those television crime dramas. Unfortunately, it more often feels like living stewardship is a lifelong journey that we will never fully comprehend.

Fortunately, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ pastoral letter on stewardship, *Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*, gives some insight into the characteristics that make up a good Christian steward. It may not have the powers of a stewardship “profiler” or “mentalist,” but it certainly gives us some tangible things to think about.

The Christian steward should display some of the following traits:

Insight – Before the disciples could live what we know as the stewardship way of life, they needed a flash of insight, or a certain way of viewing the world and their relationship to it in a fresh light. This “divine grandeur,” more than anything else, is often what sets people on the path to Christian stewardship (*Stewardship: A Disciple’s Response*, 39).

Conscientiousness – Stewards are fully conscious of their accountability in sharing of their time, talent and treasure. As caretakers of the gifts that God has given them, they have the opportunity and responsibility to use them to their fullest potential to spread God’s Kingdom on Earth (40).

Generosity – Christian stewards are generous out of love as well as duty. They should display a desire to share with and care for others based on the sacramental graces they have received. And they are also cognizant of the many warnings that the New Testament presents to those who fail in charity and authentic love (40).

Joy – Christian stewards are often presented with difficult obstacles, but they should remain joyful in the face of challenges to their lives of stewardship. Like Paul, the good steward is able to say, “I am filled with encouragement, I am overflowing with joy all the more because of all our affliction” (2 Cor. 7:4). Only by serving with a joyful spirit will stewards fully reap the rewards of their service, both in this life and the next.

Indeed, living as a Christian steward is a lifelong journey with many ups and downs along the way. But if we strive to consciously incorporate each of these characteristics into our giving of time, talent and treasure, we will find that the profile of a good Christian steward will become much clearer with each experience of service.

St. Francis Solanus

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A Journey Closer to God *continued from front cover*

and embrace the Catholic faith in preparation for his Baptism, and the other Sacraments of Initiation.

“Learning about why those things are done and the way they’re done has extreme value,” he says. “You learn what it’s all about and why you’re doing it.”

Since his Baptism, Adam has found himself growing closer to God through prayer, and as he works to incorporate his faith into daily life and his interactions with others – both within his young family, and with the college athletes he coaches.

“The clarity that faith brings in helping you make those decisions and do the right thing – it definitely helps for sure,” Adam says. “Hopefully the faith is something that

our kids are excited about, too, instead of just, ‘Do I have to go to church?’ Raising them in that way and trying to get them excited about it is something we look forward to.”

The Hightower family is excited to become more involved in the community at St. Francis Solanus, and find ways to give back to the community they have come to love.

“It’s really cool – whenever you go to church on Sunday, you’ll see people who were in your class and people who helped teach and were there for guidance,” Adam says. “Seeing their faces and being able to take part in Communion with them is a pretty cool experience. We definitely want to continue growing and getting involved in the church.”

If you would like more information on the Sacrament of Baptism, either for your child or as an adult, please contact the parish office at 217-222-2898.

Liturgy Schedule

Saturday Vigil: 4:30 p.m. | **Sunday:** 6:30, 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 a.m.

Weekday Mass: M, T, W, Th, F, 6:30 a.m. | M, T, W, Th, F, S, 8:00 a.m. | W, 8:35 a.m. during school year

Confessions: Saturdays 8:30 a.m., 3:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Holy Days of Obligation: Vigil 5:30 p.m.; Holy Day: 6:30 a.m.; 8:35 a.m. on school days; 8:00 a.m. during summer; 5:30 p.m.