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Baptism of Michael Wallace van Zyl

Date: Saturday, June 10, 2017 | **Season:** Ordinary Time before Easter | **Year:** A
First Reading: Isaiah 43:1-3
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13, 14-15 | **Response:** Psalm 91:15b
Gospel Acclamation: Mark 9:7
Gospel Reading: Mark 1:7-11
Preached at: St Dominic's Convent Chapel, Springfield Convent **in the** Archdiocese of Cape Town, South Africa**.**

We gather today to celebrate the baptism of Michael Wallace van Zyl.

As Christians, we belong to the Mystical Church of the Body of Christ, and as the first of the Sacraments of initiation, we are all gathered here to welcome young Michael into a relationship with Jesus Christ. In some parts of the world we call this occasion a 'Christening' – that is, where he takes on Christ and Christ claims him for himself.

It is a special occasion for the parents, and for the god-parents, and his wider family. But it is also a wonderful celebration for the Church.

When Michael was born, Storm and Anton named their child. In giving him a name, this was the first of many gifts he would receive. After his name, perhaps one of the greatest gifts he can receive is the gift of faith, a gift that is constantly given and received as he grows older and takes on his own role in life and in the Church and in Society.

It is by baptism that God gives the grace of the Holy Spirit. Let us recall from the scriptures when Jesus was being baptized that the heavens opened and God the Father said this is my son, the beloved. In today's Gospel we heard how Jesus said let the little children come to Him. Today we honor this command as the Church accepts Storm's and Anton's request that their child be baptized. The entire Church rejoices with this family and with Michael and we willingly embrace him as a Christian and follower of Jesus Christ – the name that is above all other names.

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Today we also gather in this Dominican Convent Chapel, to celebrate the baptism of Michael Wallace van Zyl. This is a place that contains much history for your families, as many of you were baptized here and the white garment we will later clothe Michael in has been used for generations of family members. This is a truly wonderful symbol as it shows how the faith has been transmitted from age to age.

Michael was born on January 23, the feast day of Saint John the Almoner who was the patriarch of Alexandria and was known for his great compassion and mercy. In this Pontificate of Pope Francis, compassion and mercy are auspicious qualities for the parents to remind Michael about. But they didn't name him John, or Dominic, but rather opted to call him Michael.

When we entered the Church we began this service by asking what was the name that Anton and Storm had given their son. This is because when one is baptized, they enter into a relationship with God not as a slave, but as a friend and child of God who know each other's names. Micha-el and El-ohim, Michael and God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We also signed Michael with the sign of the cross which is the mark of Christians because Jesus Christ died on the cross.

As I was explaining to Anton last night, Michael is a very biblical name – in fact it is the name of one of the chief Arch Angels – Micha-El – means 'who is like God' in Hebrew, and is often called the 'Prince' or 'Protector'. We hope that young Michael might grow up strong and healthy and be a Protector of the weak and innocent, and with the help of his parent's example and God-parents support, a defender and promoter of the faith we all hold dear.

Allow me to just explain briefly what is going to happen in this service. After this already too long hoily, we shall say some prayers, to which the response is 'Lord, graciously hear us'. These prayers are to intercede to God and ask him to bless Michael, and his family. We then ask the Saints to pray for us too, especially when we can't. We then exorcise and anoint Michael with the Oil of Catechumens. This is to remove the stain of Original Sin from Him and to prepare him to receive the new life we believe we all receive in Jesus Christ. In Baptism we make use of several symbols – these are outward signs representing a deeper reality. The oils have been blessed at the Cathedral during the Chrism Mass before Easter. After we have anointed Michael we then bless the water

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which will cleanse Michael, and we publicly, on Michael's behalf, renounce sin and Satan. At that point the actual baptism takes place and we then anoint Michael again with another oil, the Oil of Chrism. This signifies that Michael is a full Christian, a priest, a prophet and a king in the eyes of God. In this royal, priestly and prophetic state we then clothe him in White to signify he is a new creation. We will then light the candle, that represents the flame of faith the parents and God-parents have promised to keep alive for Michael.

So without further ado, let us stand and pray to God.

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