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A homily for the Baptism of Sienna Ava Rhodes

Date: Sunday, September 11, 2022 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

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: The Catholic Church of the Resurrection in Bryanston in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

We gather today to celebrate the baptism of Sienna Ava Rhodes. 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 Sienna into a relationship with Jesus Christ. In some parts of the world we call this occasion a ‘Christening’ – that is, where she takes on Christ and Christ claims her 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 Sienna Ava Rhodes was born, Ayden and Ivana Maria-Retha Rhodes named their child.

In giving her a name, this was the first of many gifts she would receive. After her name, perhaps one of the greatest gifts she can receive is the gift of faith, a gift that is constantly given and received as she grows older and takes on her 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 the Father sought to welcome the son and bid us all to rejoice. Today we honor this command as the Church accepts Ayden and Ivana Maria-Retha Rhodes' request that their child be baptized. The entire Church rejoices with this family and with Sienna Ava Rhodes and we willingly embrace her as a Christian and follower of Jesus Christ – the name that is above all other names.

When we entered the Church we began this service by asking what was the name that Ayden and Ivana had given their daughter. 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. Sienna and El-ohim, Sienna and God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. We also signed Sienna Ava Rhodes with the sign of the cross which is the mark of Christians because Jesus Christ died on the cross.

The name Sienna reminds us of Catherine of Sienna who is a co-patroness of Rome and of Sienna, that famous medieval and Italian city in Tuscany. Ava is the name of a female Benedictine Saint who we remember on April 29th. We hope that young Sienna might grow up strong and healthy and with the help of his parent's example and God-parents support, she might live a long and holy life.

Allow me to just explain briefly what is going to happen in this service. After this already too long homily, 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 Sienna, and her family. We then ask the Saints to pray for us too, especially when we can't. We then exorcise and anoint Sienna with the Oil of Catechumens. This is to remove the stain of Original Sin from Her and to prepare her 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 Sienna we then bless the water which will cleanse Sienna, and we publicly, on Sienna's behalf, renounce

sin and Satan. At that point the actual baptism takes place and we then anoint Sienna again with another oil, the Oil of Chrism. This signifies that Sienna is a full Christian, a priest, a prophet and a queen in the eyes of God. In this royal, priestly and prophetic state we then clothe her in White to signify she 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 Sienna.

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

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