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A homily for the Baptism of Simon Ethiel Hanauer and Daniel Oz Hanauer

Date: Saturday, October 8, 2022 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

First Reading: Ezekiel 36:24-28

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 26:1, 2, 3, 13-14 | **Response:** Psalm 26:1a

Second Reading: Ephesians 4:1-6

Gospel Acclamation: John 8:12

Gospel Reading: Matthew 22:35-40

Preached at: the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

We gather today to celebrate the baptism of Simon Ethiel and Daniel Oz Hanauer. 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 Simon and Daniel 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 Simon and Daniel were born, Steven and Luz named their children. In giving them carefully considered names, this was the first of many gifts they would receive. The second was welcoming them into a loving family. Today we celebrate the third gift, of welcoming them into the family of faith.

One of the greatest gifts they can receive is the gift of faith, a gift that is constantly given and received as they grow older, and takes on their 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. Jesus said let the little children come to Him. Let us also remember that Jesus was born into a Jewish family, and Simon and Daniel are lucky to live in a family that will also introduce them into the Jewish customs that such a part of Jesus' own life. It is our hope that this will lead them to understand Jesus more, and to feel close to him.

Today we honor this command as the Church accepts Luz's and Steven's request that their child be baptized. The entire Church rejoices with this family and with Simon and Daniel, and we willingly embrace them 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 Luz and Steven had given their sons. 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 knows each other's names. If I remember rightly, Simon comes from the Hebrew word *SHEMA*. Shema technically means "to hear" but, like many ancient Hebrew words, it suggests much more than that. It means to listen, to understand, and to respond. It reminds us of that great Jewish commandment in the Book of Deuteronomy, *She-ma yisrael, adonai eloheinu, adonai echad*. I understand that in Hebrew the rest is said silently so I wish to honour and respect that, but in English it means: **Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.** That is surely the hope Simon's parents had. Daniel means 'God is my Judge'. And we know that God judges with love and mercy. Our prayer today is that Simon and Daniel will grow up to know that loving and merciful God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And so it is that we are doing the formal introductions this morning between Simon and Daniel and we are all witnesses to that joyous event.

We also signed them with the sign of the cross, which is the mark of all Christians, because Jesus Christ died on the cross for all, for Jews and Greeks, Gentiles and Pagans.

But we are also all gathered here because we too remember our own baptism, and how important the Faith is for each one of us. Yours is a family with rich faith traditions, and I know also, a commitment to learning languages and cultures of others. In different ways and at different times of our life faith has meant more or less but I know in this family, it has always been an important part. Even if we practice it differently – we recognize a common belief in God and a relationship with God which Simon and Daniel are receiving today, and that is what we celebrating this morning.

For those of us unfamiliar with Baptism in this Church, please allow me to just explain briefly what is going to happen in this service. Just now 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 Daniel, and his family. We then ask the Saints to pray for us too, because we believe they can pray for us when we can’t. We then exorcise and anoint Daniel 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 all believe that 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 Simon and Daniel we then bless the water which will cleanse them both, and we publicly, on Simon and Daniel’s behalf, renounce sin and Satan. At that point the actual baptism takes place and we then anoint Simon and Daniel again with another oil, the Oil of Chrism. This signifies that they are now full Christians, priests, prophets and king in the eyes of God. In this royal, priestly and prophetic state we then clothe them in White to signify they are 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 Simon and Daniel.

Let us for a brief moment pause to thank God for our own faith and for our own traditions – forever more linked to each other in profound respect, and ask him for the Grace that we might be better examples for Simon and Daniel. And now, let us pray to God together so that we might share this gift of Faith as well.

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