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A homily for the Baptism of Oliver John Marco Knezovich

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 Oliver John Marco Knezovich. 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 Oliver 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 Oliver was born, Simone and Chris named their child. In giving him a name, this was the first of many gifts he would receive. The second was welcoming him into a loving family. Today we celebrate the third gift, of welcoming him into the family of faith.

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. Jesus said let the little children come to Him.

Today we honor this command as the Church accepts Chris and Simone's request that their child be baptized. The entire Church rejoices with this family and with Oliver, and we willingly embrace him 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 Simone and Chris 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 knows each other's names. If I remember rightly, Oliver can reminds us of the 'Olive tree'. I was at the family home last week and we planted a tree to remember princess. Our hope is that Oliver will grow strong and tall like his father, in fact, just looking at him, he's started off strong! Our prayer today is that Oliver will continue to grow up to know that loving and merciful God and be strong and tall and bear good fruit. And so it is that we are doing the formal introductions this morning between Oliver and God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit – and we are all witnesses to that joyous event.

We also signed Oliver with the sign of the cross, which is the mark of all Christians, because Jesus Christ died on the cross for all.

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. In different ways and at different times of our life it meant more or less but I know in this family, it has always been an important part. This is what we celebrate 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 Oliver, 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 Oliver 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 Oliver we then bless the water which will cleanse Oliver, and we publicly, on Oliver's behalf, renounce sin and Satan. At that point the actual baptism takes place and we then anoint Oliver again with another oil, the Oil of Chrism. This signifies that Oliver 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 Oliver until he is old enough to tend it herself.

Let us for a brief moment pause to thank God for our own faith, and ask him for the Grace that we might be better examples for Oliver. And now, let us pray to God together so that we might share this gift of Faith to Oliver as well.

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