

## TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (2024 - B)

Two weeks ago, after the 10:30 Mass at Saint Luke's, I drove down to the Cities, to Saint Agnes Church in Saint Paul where I had the privilege of baptizing my great-nephew.

My niece and her husband named him William Paul. Little William was 8 lbs. 10 ounces when he was born and was just nine days old at his baptism.

I don't know about you, but I am always amazed at newborns. They are so small to me. Their whole hand is about the size of my thumbnail, but everything is there in miniature.

I also like watching the expressions on the faces of little babies. They go through all sorts of expressions. In just a few seconds, they can look happy or puzzled or startled or scared or content. It seems like they can't figure out what they are feeling, and so they go through all sorts of expressions until they hit the right one.

Anyhow, attending the baptism were both sets of grandparents. Some of my nieces' siblings were also there, and of course the godparents were there as well. When everyone had arrived, William Paul was dressed in his baptismal gown, and we got ready for the baptism.

We made our way to the Baptismal font, and as we did so, I was thinking back to when I had baptized some of my nephews there at that very same font. That was over 30 years ago in some cases, and now here I was baptizing their children.

We began first with the prayers. Then little William was anointed with the oil of catechumens which symbolizing healing from sin. We then called on the saints to be with him. After that, the baptismal water was blessed and his parents and godparents made his baptismal promises for him.

When it came time for the baptism, his godmother held him, and I baptized him in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He didn't cry when I poured the water on his head. He just scrunched up his face a little bit and stretched out his arms.

After I baptized William, I anointed him with holy Chrism. This anointing is a sign that he had been blessed to be called a child of God. I gave his baptismal candle to his godfather, and then we all said the Lord's prayer together. After blessing the parents and all those present, we were done. Some pictures were taken, and then we went to my nieces' house for the party.

There little William was then taken from his mother who didn't get him back until he had to be fed. First his grandmother, his father's mother, played with him. She loves her grandchildren. If she had the chance, she would take them all to live with her and that would be the end of it. William has two big sisters, Veronica who is four and Annie who is two who also love him and are enthralled with him.

William's godmother was next. She and her husband were married in June and so they don't have any children yet, but they hope to be blessed soon.

My niece and her husband live in Lakeville, and they have good neighbors. However, there aren't many families in their neighborhood with little children, and so it's kind of fun to see the neighbor's reactions. They knew that my niece was expecting which becomes rather obvious as time goes by. Since the baby was born, the neighbors have been stopping by to find out what she had and bringing presents. They are all happy to have a new little neighbor.

In our holy gospel today, we are told that the rich man ran up to Jesus and knelt down before Him and said to Him, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He and nearly everyone else recognized the goodness in Jesus.

For His part, Jesus said "No one is good but God alone." In other words, God is goodness itself, He is the source of all that is good, and when we see goodness in others, it is simply a reflection of the goodness of God, or better, a participation in the goodness of God.

God manifests His goodness in His infinite perfection, and in the things that He gives to us. God reveals His goodness to us in the blessings He bestows upon us.

The Father's greatest gift to us is His Son who gave His life for us on the Cross so that we might live. However, God has given us many other blessings as well, and when I baptized little William, now filled with Sanctifying grace and smelling of Holy Chrism, and seeing the joy of all those around him, I could see that babies are also right up there among God's greatest blessings. Truly as the Psalm says, "children are a gift of the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward."

So how is it that we can have joy over new life on the one hand, and that preserving the right to kill babies in the womb is one of the top issues in this year's election. The contrast could not be more stark. How is it that Kamala Harris has made what she and many other politicians call a woman's "reproductive rights" the cornerstone of her campaign? She even boasted that she was the first candidate to visit an abortion clinic.

One might ask what changed for little William on the day he was born? The only thing that changed for him was this. On the day before he was born, he was inside his mother, in her womb, whereas on the next day he was outside viewing the world for the first time.

Even before he was born, he was very much alive. He could move about. He could stretch his arms and kick his legs. He could hear his mother's voice, and she could feel him moving about inside her. He would be startled by loud noises and jump. He would sleep, and he would wake up, and not always at the times his mother was trying to sleep – something that doesn't change after a child is born.

Yet, even though all these things are the same whether a child is inside or outside his mother, it's legal for us in Minnesota and in many other parts of the country to kill children in the womb right up to birth.

What has happened to us? How is it that we have become a nation where the large majority of people – about 70% or seven out of ten people – think that this is not only OK, but even a good thing?

You know most of us feel bad when we hit a bird or an animal with our car. A little chipmunk runs across the road and gets run over, and you say to yourself “sorry about that little guy.” You hit a robin and you go “Ohh.” I even feel that way even when I hit a butterfly.

So how is it that we can deliberately kill babies in the womb and have no remorse? How is it that we now have an entire political party that has made killing babies in the womb the cornerstone of its campaign? Also, how is it that the other party, looking at the number of people in favor of this practice has determined that being pro-life is no longer a winning issue? What kind of people have we become?

You know some people who favor abortion say a woman has a right to control her own body. However, the unborn child is not part of her body. No woman has twenty fingers or twenty toes or four lungs or two hearts. A mother has her own fingers and toes and lungs and heart and her baby has its own.

Some people who favor abortion say the baby is only a clump of tissue or it’s okay to kill it in the first few weeks or months before the baby can feel anything, but that’s not true. It’s not okay. New life begins at conception. It doesn’t matter how big or small someone is, either inside or outside the womb. They are still separate and distinct human beings, and we don’t have the right to kill innocent human life.

Pope John Paul said that we Catholics must be “unconditionally pro-life.” That said, it’s a fact that we live in a culture and society that doesn’t agree with this. We need to work to change this.

A big part of our problem is that most people don’t agree that intimacy belongs in marriage, and so they reject the life-giving part of the marriage act. We need to make sure that we don’t buy into this attitude because it is wrong. It is a misuse of the marriage act.

So, men, don’t ever put a woman in a position where she has to fear she may have conceived. Women, don’t put yourselves in a position where the goodness of new life God may entrust to you would be a worry or concern for you. There should always be joy for expectant mothers and excitement as they tell their husbands.

With regard to our society. Encourage those in your lives to see the truth about new life, that it is a blessing. Help them to know the facts about new life, that it begins at conception and that we all have the right to life from that point on. The alternative would be that might makes right and if that is so, then only the strong will be able to live without fear. Also, vote for candidates who support life. That’s one important way we can defend life.

Finally, there are many that have been wounded by abortion. Tell them that all is not lost. God is loving and merciful, and He will forgive anyone who is sorry. Urge them to go to confession and receive His mercy.

We Catholics are called to be “Unconditionally pro-life.” Let take these words to heart and make them the measure by which we treat all human life from conception to natural death. Let us not forget that all of us started out like my little grand-nephew William. Amen.