



CATHOLIC MOMENTS: BIRTH & BAPTISM

BY JAMES P. CAMPBELL

In the first paragraphs of his book *The One Thing*, Matthew Kelly shares his experience of being a father.

Last night my son woke in the middle of the night crying. He is our first child and his name is Walter Patrick. He is ten-months old and has brought more joy to my life than I ever thought I would experience.

I went to his room and taking him from his crib, placed him on my shoulder. He was immediately soothed. A minute later I could have placed him back in his crib and no doubt he would have slept peacefully for the rest of the night. But I covet these moments with him. I like to hold him as he sleeps on my shoulder, nuzzling his face into my neck, and I think about the life he will lead. I wonder what life will hold for him – what his interests will be, what he will do professionally, what the great challenges and passions of his life will be, and mostly, how he will develop into his own unique person. These thoughts always lead me to prayer. Sometimes I pray the ancient prayers of Christianity and sometimes I just spontaneously call out to God asking him to bless and watch over my son. Often my eyes fill with tears. They are the tears of a very happy and contented man, and then I find myself immersed in a sea of gratitude.

Every loving parent can echo these words as they experience the wonder of remembering the birth of their child or children. Each birth is unique, each story is unique, each child arrives helpless and in need of ongoing care. Each child is filled with potential on loan, as it were, from God for parents to nurture so that they may become the best versions of themselves.

GOD CALLS US EACH BY NAME

The Scriptures give us a number of wonderful images about God's care and concern for each of us. One of the most eloquent passages is found in Psalm 139.

Psalm 139

13 For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
15 My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
16 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.

What greater images can we find of God's care for each of us than those found in this psalm? The images show us being knit together in our mother's womb. Each moment of life from its beginning is a celebration of God's wonderful work. God calls each of us into being, God each day upholds us in life. Each day God is the foundation of our dignity as members of the human family.

Matthew's son Walter, (and now also his daughter Isabel Lenor) is born into a human family. He is also equally and individually spoken into being by God. Each of us is an expression of God that is unique. Each of us is called to make an unrepeatable contribution to the world God loves so much. But each of us also is born into the world suffering from the consequences of original sin.

As Matthew continued his reflection on Walter's potential, he also expresses concern about what the future will hold for him.

Last night I sat there holding Walter longer than usual, and in the midst of my thoughts and prayers I stumbled upon some questions. Will my son grow to appreciate the Catholic faith the way I do? Will he attend church joyfully? Will he go through a rebellious stage? Will he reject the faith of his parents and leave the Catholic Church? Will he be attracted to another religion? Will the secularism of our culture turn him away from organized religion altogether?

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that everyone is born suffering from the consequences of the sin of our first parents. This is a mystery that cannot be fully understood. While our first parents committed a *personal* sin, the consequences of their sin is to create a *fallen state* for the rest of us. With the exception of Jesus and his mother Mary each of us since has been born into a human nature deprived of the original grace of our first parents. "And this is why original sin is called "sin" only in an analogical sense: it is a sin "contracted" and not "committed: - a state and not an act." (CCC 405)

The Church is also clear that the nature of the deprivation in which we are born into is not a state of total deprivation for the human family.

Human nature is not totally corrupted: it is wounded in the natural powers proper to it; subject to ignorance, suffering, and the dominion of death; and inclined to sin - an inclination to evil that is called "concupiscence." (CCC 405).

BAPTISM

On April 17, 2010 Matthew and his wife Meggie celebrated Walter's Baptism. This is an act of faith on their part in welcoming him into the Catholic Church. In Baptism Walter received the life of grace won by Jesus Christ, which erases original sin, and turns us back towards God. In doing so Matthew and Meggie were also responding to Jesus' command as found in the Gospel according to Matthew.

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to

obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28: 18 – 20)

Through Baptism Walter (and later Isabel) entered into the life of Jesus Christ in a new way, as the Apostle Paul makes clear his Epistle to the Romans,

“ 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” Romans 6: 3 – 4)

BAPTISM TODAY

Since the Second Vatican Council the Church’s teaching on Baptism places it within the context of the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. This is a return to the understanding and practice of the early Church whose principles of conversion have been revitalized in the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults. This has also opened the way for a deeper appreciation of the symbols of Baptism and how they can help us explore the sacrament.

RITUAL OF BAPTISM FOR CHILDREN

The word *baptism* comes from the Greek word *baptizien*, which means “to dip.” In ritual of baptism the candidate is immersed into, or infused (water poured over the head), three times while the minister of the sacrament proclaims, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

When Walter was baptized, he was welcomed with the Sign of the Cross, imprinting on him the seal of Jesus Christ opening him to the grace won by Christ for the sake of the world. The minister of the sacrament asks what the parents and godparents are seeking. They answered “Baptism.” The minister asks if they are ready to accept the responsibility for raising their child in the faith. Both parents and godparents answer that they are willing to do this.

Then Walter was anointed with the oil of catechumens and the celebrant laid hands on him claiming him for Christ and praying for his protection against the powers of darkness.

The minister then proclaimed a prayer of Blessing and Invocation over the Baptismal Water. This blessing prepares the water to be a means of grace to lead the Walter to a new and spiritual birth.

The parents and godparents in Walter’s name make a profession of faith, renouncing sin and proclaiming their faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They also proclaim their faith in the Catholic Church, the communion of saints, forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

Walter was then baptized with the minister proclaiming, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

After Baptism, Walter was anointed with Chrism, a holy oil especially blessed by the bishop

and distributed during Holy Week. Walter was proclaimed to be a new creation, now clothed in Jesus Christ. He also received a baptismal garment to be brought unstained to the Judgment seat of the Lord Jesus Christ.

A baptismal candle was lit from the Easter Candle and given to Matthew and Meggie, entrusting them to keep the light of faith burning brightly.

Finally, Matthew and Meggie were blessed and reminded of their vocation to be shining examples of the faith for their child.

CONCLUSION

These are the responsibilities that Matthew and Meggie Kelly accepted in becoming Walter's parents, responsibilities they take seriously as Catholics, seeking to live the new life for themselves and their children.

As Matthew continues to reflect:

I had been sitting there holding my son for three hours now, and I felt myself starting to doze. Getting up from the big comfortable chair I place him back in his crib. He sighed, rubbed his eyes a little, and rolled over without waking. As I walked downstairs I thought about the spiritual lessons fatherhood had taught me so far.

God loves us. We hear this all the time in Christian circles, and for some reason I had always believed that. But now I felt it. It had become real to me in fatherhood. You see, I love my son so much. I love him more than I ever thought I was capable of loving. And if I can love him this much – in all my weakness and brokenness – how much God must love his children.

God yearns to be with us. When I am at the office I can't wait to get home and roll around on the ground with Walter and cuddle him. When I am away from home traveling I miss my son. I miss his touch, his noises, and the smell of his sweet skin. I just yearn to be with him. In the same way, as I reflect on human history and our Judeo-Christian story, what strikes me is the way God is constantly reaching out to us. He wants to be with us. God yearns to be with us. And so often we complicate our relationship with God when above all else it would seem that he simply wants to be with us.

In Baptism we celebrate this presence of God who loves us and his yearning for us.

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For a free copy of Jim Campbell's book, *Every Man's Journey*, visit **DynamicCatholic.com**