

Joy in the Heart

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER [b]

April 15, 2018

Baptism of Hannah Albrecht and Caterina Robinson

PSALM 4

¹ Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!

You have given me relief when I was in distress.

Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!

² O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame?

How long will you love vain words and seek after lies?

³ But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself;

the LORD hears when I call to him.

⁴ **Be angry, and do not sin;**

ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.

⁵ **Offer right sacrifices,**

and put your trust in the LORD.

⁶ **There are many who say, "Who will show us some good?**

Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!"

⁷ **You have put more joy in my heart**

than they have when their grain and wine abound.

⁸ **In peace I will both lie down and sleep;**

for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

Baptism, says Peter, saves you.

That a little ritual of pouring water and speaking words could save somebody, this is hard to believe. Too simple, too common. We want something more.

Yet, there the words of the Apostle stand, *Baptism saves you. It is not, says Peter, a removal of dirt from the body, but is an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Christ Jesus.*

[1 Peter 3:21]

Pouring of water, speaking of words. For this to save a sinner from a trembling conscience and from damnation—too much is being expected from too little if the water and word of Baptism will do that.

Yet, we can't get rid of the Apostle's words: *Baptism now saves you.*

And so the Lord gathers his people to his Name. At his Name, he is there—where he gathers two or three together to his Name, there he is in the midst of them. Where he comes in his Name, he is there handing out his gifts. Of these gifts, this morning we were given to see the Lord's Baptism given to little Caterina and little Hannah.

Baptism, certainly not just water, but the Word of God in and with the water working the forgiveness of sins, rescuing from death and the devil, and giving eternal salvation to all who have faith in the gift, as the words and promises of God declare.

So we are given to see this gift to little Caterina and little Hannah. For while they cannot go to the cross where salvation was won, and nor can we, yet the Lord brings the salvation of the cross to them in his gift of Baptism, and to us, so that, as Paul says,

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were, therefore, buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too would walk in new life.

[Romans 6:4]

What do we hope for little Caterina and little Hannah? What do we hope for all our children, for all the children of the Church?

We hope many things for them. Maybe we hope for great gifts of music, that the little girl or little boy would be able to bring this gift of music to others. Maybe we hope for a mind strong in mathematics, or for a diligence in reading. Certainly we hope for strong and healthy bodies.

We hope for a child to be brought up with good skills, to be taught to read and do homework with joy and diligence, to be taught honor and respect—we hope for all children to learn to lead orderly and productive lives, to serve their neighbors with generosity and kindness.

We hope that we ourselves are able to recognize the particular gifts the Lord gives to each child and to speak with encouragement, rejoicing in the way the Lord dispenses his gifts as he so chooses to each.

We hope for all of these gifts for our children, we commend the children to the Lord's care, and we speak this encouragement to one another.

But all of this doesn't yet have us to what St. Peter speaks of—a *good conscience*. A conscience relieved of all trembling, a conscience cleansed of sin, a conscience at peace before the Lord: this belongs to Baptism's promise: *Baptism now saves you, says Peter, not the removal of dirt from the body, but an appeal to God for a good conscience.*

Psalm 4, the words we chanted this morning for the Introit, speaks of the joy of this gift of a good conscience before the Lord.

⁴ **Be angry, and do not sin;**

Ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.

[Psalm 4:4]

Our translation has “Be angry and do not sin.” But the Hebrew word used in Psalm 4 is not about anger as in temper and wrath. It’s about trembling and turmoil. It’s the same word Job uses when he describes himself on his bed, writhing in pain, covered in sores, and Job explains, *I have no rest, but turmoil comes. Or, trembling comes* (Job 3:26).

Psalm 4 is of a man going to bed with a trembling conscience and not knowing what to do.

Be in turmoil, tremble,

says Psalm 4,

but do not sin.

How do you not sin when you are trembling in your conscience?

To sin would be to try to ease your conscience yourself by turning to your own works. To try to cleanse your conscience by gaining your own worthiness. This has the Christian doing all kinds of exercises and backflips to change his life or to make better choices or whatever other teachings of the Law seem to provide a way out.

But while the Law will seem to always provide a way to change your life, and while teachers of the Law will, for that very reason, always be popular in our sinful world—for who doesn’t want to change or improve their life?—the Law will never cleanse a conscience.

So Psalm 4 says,

Tremble, be in turmoil, but do not sin.

Do not sin by looking to your own works, do not sin by thinking that the Christian’s life is improved or changed by the Law, but, says the Psalm, *On your beds, ponder in your hearts, converse in your conscience, and be silent, be at peace.*

What is the source of this peace? What is the rescue from this trembling so that we can go to bed with joy in the heart? Psalm 4:7:

Lift up upon us the light of your face, O Lord,

For you give joy in my heart ...

So in peace I will lie down and go to sleep,

For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

What is this face of the Lord which is light to the sinner? It's God in the flesh, come to save sinners. It's Jesus. Luke 24:36:

As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!"³⁷ But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.³⁸ And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?³⁹ See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

Jesus comes to the sinner, he comes to us, he sees the trembling conscience, and he says, *Peace to you*. This is the peace of the Resurrected Lord, saying,

Why are you troubled, why do you have doubts in your hearts? See my hands and my feet. It is I myself.

The doubt in your heart, it is expelled by joy. The trembling, it is replaced by peace. The conscience? It is a conscience made good and whole before the Lord.

For he who took our sin and shame upon himself, and crucified it in his own body on the cross, he who was raised up from the dead to live and breathe with his eternal body, he brings his cross and his resurrection to us—for as many of us as have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been united with him in his death and with him in his resurrection.

This is the joy in the heart, the gladness in the conscience, which the Law cannot give, but which the Lord gives in his Gospel. It is the gift of Baptism, which is not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God of a good conscience.

It is the song of Psalm 4:

Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!"

You have put joy in my heart ...

In peace I will lie down and sleep.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.