

Hallelujah! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart!

What a joy, on my fourth Sunday with you, that we are blessed to have the baptism of Gwendolyn Jean Murphy! Today, is indeed a day for celebration.

Hallelujah! We shall give thanks to the Lord with our whole hearts!

My friends, I have a question for you — what are the things that you find yourself grateful for on this day?

Returning briefly to the words of the Psalmist...The deeds of the Lord are great...so great, that they are studied by all who delight in them. Holy Baptism is one of these great deeds of the Lord and one of the two great Sacraments (there are seven in total, with the other great Sacrament being the Holy Eucharist) given by Christ to his Church. Sacraments (for those unsure of the meaning of the word) are the outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace.

In other words, Holy Baptism is a visible sign — something outwardly tangible (we can see, hear, feel it) — of the grace that God bestows upon us that dwells within us, spiritually. All of the sacraments are given by Christ as — sure and certain means — by which we receive God's grace. Christ has given these things to the Church so that we may never forget that we TOO, 2000 years after Christ walked upon the earth with us — we TOO have opportunity to be adopted into the Kingdom of God. We TOO have access to the healing grace of God. We TOO are recipients of God's divine love that always, always, always, works in the world about us.

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Baptismal rites precede the Christian church. As a matter of fact, rites of immersion are part of the Old and New Testaments to serve a variety of purposes. Immersion in water was used to restore ritual purity and cleanliness (so that one could go back into the Temple and the community), as a method for conversion to Judaism, for the repentance of sins (as proclaimed by John the Baptist), and, to welcome a new member into God's kingdom in the name of Jesus Christ. In all of these, one thing is held in common. Baptism is a vehicle by which grace, healing, and reconciliation from God are bestowed upon humans — an outward sign of the invisible grace freely given to us.

At the start of this sermon, I asked a question: what are the things that you find yourself grateful for on this day?

In our Gospel lesson this morning, we heard the story of the ten lepers who asked for mercy, and were granted it. No questions asked, outward and visible healing, bestowed upon unconditionally by God.

Of the ten, only one expressed gratitude...a Samaritan. What about the other nine? Have they forgotten to return to say thank you because they are familiar with these rites and rituals and have come to anticipate or expect God's healing? We aren't given the information. The Samaritan (a foreigner and not Jewish) may not have been familiar with these rites of immersion and cleansing. Could this be the reason he expressed gratitude and awe at the miracle bestowed upon him? Perhaps...

In Zen Buddhism, there is a concept called, "Beginner's Mind." This is a perspective of intention, by which you approach all things with a as if you have never done it before, even if you are an expert in it. The idea is that when we open our hearts, minds, and souls and drop our expectations and preconceived ideas, we are able to be more curious and joyful, and consequently, more possibilities in the experience are created.

Today, is a special day. Any day that we welcome a new member into the kingdom of God is an opportunity to celebrate. And, if we approach this day with a beginner's mind, it opens our hearts, minds, and souls to new possibilities. In our Baptismal liturgy, a part of what we do is remember our own promises to God and to the kingdom. It is our practice to revisit our own convictions and our commitment to BE (to the best of our human ability) the embodied presence of divine love actively at work in the world. It is our opportunity to express our gratitude by recommitting ourselves to "pay it forward" and recenter our intention towards service to God.

Today, I invite you to approach those Baptismal Vows with a "beginner's mind." Imagine that you are doing this for the very first time. Let the words that you hear and speak wash over your hearts as if you've never heard them before. Imagine that you aren't all experts in the service to God (and, for the record, I'm learning that you are all experts at loving service to God and others), but for the sake of this joyous day, approach this day with a beginner's mind. Think and ponder on the promises you make to God. Pay attention and linger on the words that God puts on your hearts. Perhaps, you will discover something new, or maybe something old will be healed. Then, at the Holy Eucharist, return to this beautiful, newly carpeted altar, with gratitude in your heart. Be the Samaritan, the tenth leper, who returned to say here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it, and I shall be forever grateful in service to you.

Hallelujah! We will give thanks to the Lord with our whole hearts.

Amen.