

## **Companions on the Journey**

September 22, 2019

Dear Friends in Christ,

In every celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism there is a moment right at the beginning when the priest or deacon asks the parents what name they are giving to their child. After receiving the answer the priest asks again: "And what do you ask of God's Church for this child?" The answer is simple: "Baptism." Then the priest approaches the little one and with thumb or forefinger he signs the forehead of the little one with the sign of the cross. The priest then asks the parents and the Godparents to do the same, sign the child's forehead with the sign of the cross.

We all know that Jesus died on the cross. We all know that it was an instrument of both torture and capital punishment that the Roman Empire used for hundreds of years to intimidate local populations of conquered people not to revolt or get out of line. If you mess with Rome you will end up hanging from a cross. But with Jesus everything changes. With his death and the way he died and with all that he said from the cross, the cross is changed forever. "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." "Behold your mother!" "I thirst!" "Father into your hands I commend my spirit." "It is finished." And with the triumphant and victorious emergence from the tomb on Easter, something new has been unleashed on the face of the earth. A new power is born. The power of selfless and forgiving love is proven the most significant power in all the world, more powerful even than death and the grave.

The cross is a sign of Christ's victory. The cross is the sign of that love—in action. That is why we sign the child's head with the cross. It is the loving victory of Jesus that we desire to be imparted to this little one. Later on in the ceremony the parents and Godparents are reminded and encouraged to take seriously their responsibility to raise their child in the faith that is being celebrated. They are reminded that they are to give the witness of their lives to their child for the good of the child's soul. This is one of their primary responsibilities as parents, much more important than any other responsibility.

Our parish stands ready to assist our parents to fulfill their roles as Catholic moms and dads to carry out the process of leading these little ones into the realm of faith, to help them to believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. But there is never any substitute more effective than a dad or a mom helping to teach their child to pray and to care and to believe in Jesus and to encounter Him in the sacraments. Especially dads have a powerful impact on their children. Families where the father is active in his faith have a far better success ratio than other families in raising children who will become adult believers in Christ. Let us encourage each other to be our best selves especially where the faith of our little ones is concerned.

In the Peace of Christ,  
Msgr. McHenry