

BULLETIN – JUNE 12

Meijer Community Rewards has announced the end of its longstanding program. June is the last month any shoppers who have participated can continue to apply a certain percentage of their total spending to the charity of their choice. Over the years, quite a number have applied this to SS. Peter & Paul, and we are very grateful. Once every three months, we have received a check from Meijer, usually in an amount between \$100 and \$200, thanks to our parishioners and friends who have remembered us in this way. Our last check will arrive in September. Meijer hopes that shoppers will use the Meijer Gift Card program to accomplish in the future what they have so generously done in the past. For additional information, you may call (800) 487-9460 or go online at www.meijer.com/giftcard.

Farewell, Father Joseph! After a little over a year as chaplain at the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans and resident priest here at SS. Peter & Paul, Father Joseph Kahumburu Kiragu is moving back to his native Kenya to take on new work at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa in Nairobi, which is an institution of higher learning serving students from the several countries of the region. Father has extensive pastoral experience, besides having served as a seminary rector in Kenya, so he is well equipped for his new tasks.

Father Joseph came to us on March 19, the Solemnity of St. Joseph, in 2015. As it happened, it was the day my mom fell, never to return home; and thus also the day that Mom's dog, Coco, moved in with us here. Father Joseph took all that commotion in stride, and has been a fine companion in the rectory. I have personally appreciated his willingness to assist with weekday Masses on numerous occasions. It has been wonderful to have the aroma of fine cuisine wafting through the house; and to behold Coco regularly begging and enjoying a portion of that cuisine from Father's generous hands. It has been even more wonderful to have the visible expression of the universal Church present in our midst in the person of a fellow priest. The additional power of his prayers and his fraternal support have been most welcome. We assure him of our prayers as he returns home now for a new chapter in his priestly ministry and service to the people of God. Father will be leaving us around the end of this week, so we extend to him our fond farewell.

Original or actual, it's sin. Phil Robertson from *Duck Dynasty* was on a national radio talk show recently, offering solid evangelical thoughts on many things. He did get into an area, though, where many evangelicals get tripped up: talking about how he believes one should not be baptized until one is old enough to understand right from wrong and has actually committed sin. "Sin entered the world through one man," St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans (5:12). The same Apostle goes on to say, "The many died by the trespass of one man" (5:15). It might not seem fair to us. But how fair is it that the runoff from farmland between here and Lansing pollutes the Grand River by the time it gets downstream to us? How fair is it that chemicals and heavy metals dumped into the river years ago by long-closed industries are stirred up into a toxic stew every time it rains? That's kind of the meaning of original sin.

When sin entered the world through Adam's original sin, it made the atmosphere poisonous for all of us born into it. Christ was the only one who could take all that pollution onto himself and free us from its grasp. Baptism into the Paschal Mystery of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection – AT ANY AGE – frees us from the immediate grasp of that pollution and, to further protect us, enables us to grow in God's grace and virtue. Through baptism, we become adopted children of God and members of his New Covenant family – AT ANY AGE – just as circumcision for the males among God's people did under the former covenant. Whether we are male or female, slave or free, makes no difference. And the Acts of the Apostles and the constant tradition of the Church from the beginning indicates that ALL the members of believing households could be and were baptized – AT ANY AGE.

Parents who value the promise of eternal life for their children will give them the most important head start of their lives by having them baptized as soon as possible after birth, in keeping with the instruction found in the Church's liturgy of baptism. The hesitation about or even condemnation of infant baptism is found only from the time of the Radical Reformers after the Reformation in the 1500's, when some teachers began to take the "Scripture alone" principle to its extremes. Having rejected all authority of the Church, they disregarded the practice of the Church from apostolic times in favor of their own interpretation of what it meant to have an active faith. We understand an infant to be in an ideal state of total receptivity to the power and grace of baptism, and we heed the Lord's command, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them" (Matthew 19:14). They of course need the guidance of a practicing, believing family if the seeds of faith are to grow in them. That is why, when parents are NOT practicing, baptism is often postponed if there is no evidence that the child will actually be raised in the faith. In that case, it is not the Church "punishing" the child for the parents' neglect, but rather preferring not to saddle the child with Christian obligations which the parents themselves are not ready to observe.

Once baptism has been celebrated, the baptized person is indeed freed from original sin. However, even with massive doses of the protective grace of God, the person also retains free will and the power to use it. The question is not infrequently asked, "If God knew we were going to commit sin, why did he give us free will?" The answer is really quite simple. To quote the old Catechism, God created us to know him, to love him, and to serve him in this world, and to be happy with him forever in heaven. But God will not force us to do any of those things. We are made in his image. Love is always an active choice. We must have free will in order to love, else there would be no choice about it and we would be mere puppets. God has all the other animals which act and respond by instinct. We are created in God's own image, and that includes having a free will.

Having the freedom to love means having the freedom to do the opposite. It has to. And when we do the opposite, that is, when we commit sin, it is called *actual* sin. It is not inherited. We ourselves commit it, and we cannot blame Adam and Eve. The sacrament of penance is how the grace of our baptism is continually renewed in us sinners. It stands to reason that those Christians who have not continued the practice of the sacrament of penance might eventually arrive at the point where they imagine that baptism can only be a conscious choice at an age beyond infancy. And then, many of them fall into yet another heresy, that which we might call the alleged "sinlessness of the

saved.” It goes like this: “I have accepted Christ, I have been saved, he has forgiven my sins, and nothing I can do can ever separate me from him.” Wouldn’t that be nice? Except it’s so unrealistic that even St. Paul could say, “I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest having preached to others, I myself be lost” (I Corinthians 9:27).

The people of God traditionally carried on the practice of admitting members at the time of infancy, as well as into adulthood for those who converted from other religions or no religion. In Judaism, that admission was for males, through circumcision. In Christianity, that was where there was no distinction between male and female, as members of both sexes, boys and girls, men and women, were all admitted to the people of God through baptism, “the bath of regeneration” (Titus 3:5). There is no second-class citizenship in the people of God. There are different gifts and different vocations, but the call to holiness is universal. God bless you!

Fr. Den

Thought for the week: “Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth” (Muhammad Ali, 1942-2016).