

Bonnie the Baptized

by Steven J. Kolbe

The first bath was easy. The nurse gently sponged her off and I stood beside the sink, one half awestruck and one half terrified, making me one whole dad. For the second bath, we had Susan's sister to guide us along. It was short and efficient and I completely forgot to take notes. Which brings us to bath number three...bath number three was a massacre. The water was everywhere, Bonnie was screaming, we were running this way and that like two sleep-deprived chickens whose coop had just caught fire, and then—because I tried to carry her all the way from the changing table in the nursery to the bath tub on the kitchen floor, just as clothed as God made her—Bonnie peed all over me. By the time we *started* that infamous bath, my cupped hands were full and my shirt was soaked, and I couldn't help but wonder how two college educated people like ourselves could end up living like this.

It took us a month to get the hang of it, and then she started to actually enjoy bath time. By then Susan had an extensive checklist of wash cloths and duck towels and creams and soaps and I had a fool proof method for getting the water temperature just right. (You make it one degree too hot and then throw in an ice cube.) Also, our daughter had learned to splash, causing us each time to break into spontaneous renditions of “Splish Splash (I Was Taking a Bath),” which made us not mind so much that we were getting covered in water.

It all seemed like good preparation for Bonnie's first sacrament. This time, however, it wasn't going to be sour milk we were cleaning off our baby, but rather the most ancient of meals gone bad: Original Sin.

Because Susan has seen plenty of baptisms, her thoughts were mainly occupied with people—the friends and family who had come from near and far—and with making sure they were all welcomed and got to see the baby and were going to be fed. As always, while

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she worried about what actually mattered, I kept my head permanently lodged in the clouds.

As we approached the baptismal font, I thought of all the parishioners who dipped their fingers each Sunday in these waters to make the sign of the cross on their foreheads, recalling their own baptisms. As we came a little closer, I saw the cleansing waters of the Jordan, the humble Lamb approaching John the Baptist with Bonnie swaddled in his arms. Susan meanwhile had an eye on the Godparents, making sure they were in position, another eye on our niece Katie who was standing dangerously close to the three-foot tall candle and, somehow, a third mama-eye on me holding Bonnie in her slick baptismal gown.

The deacon raised the pitcher of holy water and I moved our daughter over the font toward her own personal parting of the Red Sea. Then her eyes grew wide as the water poured over her forehead and I realized, for the 20,000th time, that “Hey, we have a daughter. This is *our* baby. Here is our little human, perfectly made.”

And then my next thought: “Oh, please Lord, in your infinite mercy, don't let her poop in the water.”

