

Seventh Sunday of Easter 2019
Baptism of the Hetherington Twins
Fr Jonathan Jong

Acts 7.55-60

Revelation 22.12-14, 16-17, 20

John 17. 20-26

One of the perks of getting baptised in Eastertide—for those who care about this sort of thing—is that one gets to be baptised with water blessed at the Easter Vigil. However, peering into the font last week, I noticed that our batch of holy water had grown mouldy: it was indeed full of life, though perhaps not as we would intend.

Water is an ambivalent element. It is essential for human life. 55-60% of adult human body mass is water; for Samuel and Edmund, it's more like 75%. Water is crucial for pretty much every physiological process: the transportation of nutrients and waste, the lubrication of joints, the production of hormones and

neurotransmitters, the regulation of body temperature. We need water, and we know it: thirst is our body's alert signal that we are running low. The necessity of and our desire for water is partly what makes it such a powerful symbol for baptism.

But water is dangerous too. According to the World Health Organization, waterborne diseases are responsible for over 2 million deaths annually, mostly affecting children in developing countries.¹ And the OECD estimates that floods cause more than £30 billion worth of damage and losses each year, affecting 250 million people, again mostly those already poor.² We worried about both categories—disease and disaster—growing up in Malaysia: exposed still water meant dengue fever, water fountains cholera, and December the monsoon's flash floods.

¹ https://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/diseases-risks/diseases/diarrhoea/en/

² <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/natural-disasters/floods/>

Water is dangerous, and so is baptism. Baptism is a kind of *drowning*: in baptising them, we are today putting Samuel and Edmund to death, binding them to Christ's death, so that they too may enjoy the new life of his resurrection. And it *is* his life that they will enjoy, to which they are called: a life lived for others rather than for themselves, for the sake of the world, even unto death, let alone the minor inconveniences that love and justice often require. It is a blessed coincidence that we had as our first reading this morning the story of Stephen, deacon and martyr: a life dedicated to the service of the needy, cut short for the commitments that inspired that life. Such are the risks for which baptism marks us.

Sara and Michael, you have chosen for your children to be consigned to such a life, with so difficult a calling; and therefore, you will be responsible for preparing them for it. They do not understand this call that is being placed upon them, but then again, neither do

you, any more than you understood the gravity of the vows you made to one another on your wedding day.

And in humble acknowledgement of your incompetence, you have requested some help, in the shape of godparents. Gareth, Joanna, and Andrew; Maria, Frances, and Peter: beyond getting dressed up and coming all this way, your job is to help Sara and Michael—for the rest of your lives—in this most holy of vocations, teaching and encouraging Samuel and Edmund to love. Primarily, you will do this by loving them: caring for them, playing with them, listening to them, laughing and weeping with them. But you are also to live lives fit for their emulation: human beings are social animals, and we learn best by example. Let your example be worthy of Samuel and Edmund, these new lives you have been called to shape. This responsibility may be more than you signed up for, I understand: but I'm banking on the assumption that you are too British to back out now.

And finally, there is the rest of us. This is, from now and for ever, Samuel and Edmund's church: we are their people, upon whom they may always call, to whom they may always return, no matter where their lives take them, no matter how recently or how long ago it's been since we've last seen them. We have their backs: and yours too, Sara and Michael. Or as Jesus says in John's gospel, we are perfectly one; the love with which God loves is to be found among us. Like you, we don't really understand what this all means, let alone how to pull it off. But we promise we will try.

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Blessed indeed are those whose robes are washed; those whose thirst is quenched by this gift of water. And blessed are we too, who get to call Samuel and Edmund our own, a gift unto us, and to the whole world.