

Baptism of Our Lord

It seems to me that, however far they have distanced themselves from the church, most parents still want baptism for their children. It may be for reasons which fall short of the ideal such as - to go along with their grandparents wishes or to secure a place in the catholic school. I've even heard parents say: "It's time we had the baby done".

However, if we all looked into our conscience, could any of us say, 'hand on heart' that our motives for doing anything important were always entirely pure. The First Reading says: 'he does not break the crushed reed or quench the wavering flame'. That could easily apply to people seeking baptism for their children. There are times when our faith is tested or sometimes put on hold. The church may even seem a forbidding place. In today's reading from Isaiah, it says: "I have taken you by the hand and formed you" Perhaps, as a catholic community we need, as it were, to 'take more people by the hand' and encourage them in their faith especially if they feel a bit estranged from the Church.

Having said that I don't think the baptism of children should be treated in a sort of cavalier way either, where commitment to the church is not considered important. Baptism is primarily for entry into the church not into the catholic school. If our main motive for baptism is entry into the catholic system, then our priorities need rearranging. If children are not exposed to Sunday Mass then Mass in the school will not be what it should be. Deprivation doesn't just refer to physical needs – we can be very much deprived spiritually as well.

Some people mistakenly think that putting off baptism until children are old enough to decide for themselves is the way to proceed. I can't see that. Children are hardly going to decide for Christ if they've never heard of Him. If in ordinary life the children are gradually introduced to their wider natural family,

surely it's only right that they get acquainted with their church family as well. For the seeds of baptism to grow, children need to feel part of a community of faith. Jesus said: 'let the little children come to me and do not stop them'. Have we put any obstacles in the way of our children or grandchildren attending Mass?

Families seem to live as more isolated units these days. So coming to Mass, as well as developing their personal faith will expose them to the wider community of faith and draw them into closer union with Our Lord. In my experience the happiest teenagers are not those who are savvy with social media but those who belong to faith groups like Youth 2000 or go on what is known as 'celebrate' or 'Walsingham' weekends with thousands of other young people. The bishop of Plymouth who attended one of these weekends said: 'I was struck by the joy and enthusiasm of so many young people in their faith'.

A final word from **the Holy Father**: "Parents have a grave duty to help their children to seek the Truth from their earliest years and live in conformity with it." Baptism is the start of this faith journey which only ends in Heaven.