

THE YOUNG CHURCH TODAY



JUBILEE OF CHILDREN:
MAY 24-25

When our son Roman was baptized, we joked that there would be more kids than adults at the ceremony and reception. His godparents have two girls, and we have four kids. The other two couples we invited had a combined total of six kids. If you're counting, that's 12 kids present at this baptism. Upon reflection, this baptism felt much different from the others we have participated in, and it was because of the children.

The children ranged in age from 5 months to 8 years old. No one was still. Some were talking, and one or two may have cried, but they were present. Some were more engaged than others, with varying levels of participation, but they were all excited to be part of this special day.

Father Dan Hoffman, acting administrator at St. Titus Parish in Titusville, celebrated Roman's baptism. He made sure not only to address the adults but also to explain the different parts of the sacrament to the children. The children were invited to the altar to witness and engage with the rite. Father Dan paid particular attention to describing the importance of what he was doing. He discussed the different oils and their uses and said that Roman's baptism was a gift for all of us. It was an opportunity to renew the vows made at our own baptisms.

As circumstance would have it, our eldest daughter, Stella, was studying the sacrament of baptism in school that week. She got to live out what she was learning in her classroom. She is in second grade, and will have her first reconciliation in March, and next year, she will receive her first Holy Communion. Of course, her brothers and sister will be in attendance for those milestones. Although they might not understand what is going on, they will be exposed to those sacraments before they are the ones participating.

Since it's not the norm to have four kids, many times my husband and I are treated like crazy people for having "so many" children. At restaurants, we get eye rolls and huffed breaths from hostesses when we tell them how many people in our party, noting that four of them are children. When I take all four of my kids to a store or the playground, I'm often told that I have my



Godparents, James and Brianna Erdman stand by the baptismal font at Our Lady of Peace Church, Erie, with Father Dan Hoffman, and parents Melanie and Dominick Sisinni.

hands full (as if I didn't know). In a previous article, I wrote about visiting another diocese and feeling very unwelcome when my baby made typical infant noises during Mass.

The National Eucharistic Congress (NEC) last summer was filled with big families attending family and youth sessions. It was not uncommon to see parents with three or more children walking around the Indianapolis Convention Center. One thing that has

stuck with me, through all the profound experiences at the NEC is a thought from a homily during one of the daily youth Masses: These children are not the future of the Catholic Church. *They are the young church today.*

The church is alive in these little souls, and we are giving them and ourselves a gift when we bring them to Mass or bring them to witness sacraments of the church and explain their importance.

Of course, this is no easy task. We can't hold our children to the impossible standards of sitting perfectly still and silent. They're tiny people with thoughts and feelings that they don't quite know how to manage yet. I'm sure we've all come into contact with some adults who don't know how to manage their thoughts and feelings. Why would we expect children to behave better than grown adults? They are young and learning how to act in different circumstances. Of course, they are going to make mistakes and may not be on their best behavior all the time. However, this is our time to lead by example. We must include, encourage and respect them as the young church. Today. †



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