Sermon for October 27, 2024
Baptism of Mara Ottman

Homily: Before I begin with the more religious stuff, I want to welcome Mara to the world of second-born children. You are entering a powerful sorority! My daughter-in-law's younger sister Madison, earlier this week, wrote me this when I asked for opinions about being second-born:

> "In high school, I took a psychology class. Now, years later, I only remember the section on birth order. Firstborns were described as ambitious, perfectionistic, and outspoken. Secondborns were described as agreeable, diplomatic, and compromising. Check, check, check. She fit her first born descriptors and I fit mine.
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> With a significant age gap, we rarely crossed paths in the school halls. One perk of attending a small private school was that everyone knew everyone. I took pride in being "Mackenzie's little sister." I doubt she had that same sense of pride when everyone knew that "Mackenzie's little sister" burned a brownie in the school microwave, filling the building with smoke. Regardless, it felt amazing to be known as her little sister.
>
> [Tell the baby to] Embrace your second-ness! Knowing I am someone's little sister, with all its ups and downs, is one of my greatest joys in life."

The hero of Christianity is God, of course, but in his incarnation of Jesus we have an amazing firstborn to look up to. His younger brother James was no slouch, either, going on to lead the church in Jerusalem through really terrible years and writing one of the most popular Epistles in the Bible. I didn't even know Jesus had any siblings until a friend showed me, freshman year in college, the places in the New Testament where they were mentioned.

We just heard about our first-born savior healing blind Bartimaeus, who has total faith in Jesus. He lives in Jericho, maybe the oldest named town in the world, close by the Jordan River where Jesus himself was baptized.

Imagine Bartimaeus in his early weeks following Jesus around, thinking, 'He still opens my eyes all the time: I used to have to imagine how the world would look. I don't think I will ever stop saying "wow." How blue the sky is! How lovely my wife is. I can see the wheat field down by the river, when the wind makes them wave like water on the lake. That's *wonderful*. Someday I hope to see the great Ocean.'

Bartimaeus joined up with Jesus in person. We do it with our minds. Our emotions. Baptizing a baby is kind of like an extended family having a birthday party. Mara and Matilda and Matt and Meggie are part of St. John's MacKinnon-Morrow clan, led by grandma Kate and grandpa Michael. Mara's uncles Will and Kirk were raised here, and great-grandma Marge. We welcome the Ottmans, too, who first came here in 2018, for Mara's parents' wedding, and I was joined by their kind and engaging young parish priest who led the service with me.

Baptism is a great river of many streams. John's Jordan River, washing old lives awayyy downstream. The stream that imitates the waters of our mothers' wombs. The stream of people following Jesus, beginning with people like Jesus' mom, and later on, believers like Bartimaeus.

In my family, I'm the oldest, like Meggie and Matilda. My own sister had this to say when I emailed her about being second born like Mara:

> "I went from being a newborn in a hospital portrait to a toddler in one fell swoop! There is no documentation of [me] rolling over, first smile, solid food, crawling, first birthday cake debacle – so being the second child can mean a lot less pressure to perform. I'm sure I really did all of those things, and better than my older brother, at a younger age, because I was watching him and learning from his trial and error. I flew under the radar. And having me around probably meant that our parents weren't watching him as closely, letting us play, do chores, and create theatrics or games together.
> I wish I was with you right now to comment on the sermon in the secret sign language we invented to communicate in church, but it would be kind of awkward for my big brother."

Mara, We give thanks for you and your big sister. Thanks that your parents found each other and bring you here so we can all learn to walk the Way of Love. Jesus gave his human life a 100% try, including the scariest part, the suffering and the death, so we could understand than God isn't too cool or too far above to try being one of us, to see what having a human mind and body was really like. Richard Wilbur said it like this: *by his descent among us, the worlds are reconciled.*

Mara, now it's time for us to say probably too many words about baptism, and God, and Jesus, and water, and sin, and salvation, but what it all means is: we will do our best for you. Welcome to the family, little one!