

In the *Rite of Baptism of Adults*, the catechumen is asked some questions in preparation for receiving Baptism.

The first question is:

*What do you ask of God's Church?*

And the answer is: *Faith*.

The second question is:

*What does faith offer you?*

And the answer is: *Eternal life*.

Today is the Feast of the Holy Family. It is normally the Sunday between Christmas Day and New Years Day. And so, this is where we find ourselves - the weekend after Christmas.

This feast has its origins in the 17th century, stemming from devotion to the Holy Family. It wasn't until 1893 when Pope Leo XIII instituted it as a liturgical feast and not until 1921 that Pope Benedict XV (the fifteenth) extended its celebration to the entire Church. Then it was the weekend after Epiphany, but in 1969 it was bumped back a couple of weeks to where we have it now.

In the first reading from the Book of Genesis, we hear of the 'miracle' of the birth of Isaac. Both Abraham and Sara were in their 80s. Yet in this text, God makes a covenant with Abraham, telling him,

*Look up at the sky and count the stars, if you can.*

*Just so . . . shall your descendants be.*

This is seen by Biblical Scholars as a covenant between God and Abraham. A covenant is a bit like a contract. While both are agreements, contracts can be broken while covenants cannot.

Immediately following this line in Genesis, we hear that:

*Abr[ah]am put his faith in the LORD,*

*who credited it to him as an act of righteousness.*

In the Letter to the Hebrews, the author fleshes out how Abraham's 'collateral' in the covenant with God is faith. Because of his faith, God

fulfills the promises of their agreement ... over and over ... through an unbroken line of generations.

As Christians, Baptism is the first of seven Sacraments. The 'gateway' into the other Sacraments.

The word 'sacrament' is from the Latin 'sacramentum' which implies a sacred oath. This sacred oath implies an underlying act of consecration and was seen to establish a direct relationship between a person and the Divine.

Rightly so, this word was assumed into the western Christian vocabulary to identify the covenantal acts that create, strengthen, and reinforce our relationship with God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ... as well as with the Christian community – the Church.

Our 'collateral' in these covenants is Faith – which is given us as a free gift at Baptism. It is strengthened and reinforced through the other Sacraments, building up our relationship with God and with His holy people.

And as such, today's feast is about the Holy Family – Jesus, Mary, and Joseph ... but also those of us adopted into the Family of Christ, the Church.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ ... let us pray for the graces to repair, strengthen, and confirm our relationships ... both with God and with each other. May our presence as members of God's family help us to imitate the Holy Family in everything we say and do.