

Pro-Life PERSPECTIVE

Motherhood and the Gift of the *Rite for the Blessing of a Child in the Womb*

by Norma Montenegro Flynn

The month of May, dedicated to Mary, Mother of Jesus, also celebrates the joy of motherhood. Mother's Day is a special day when we cherish the precious gift of life, the life we receive from our mothers and the life we give to our children. Last year's was particularly special to me as an expectant mother.

Feeling my baby constantly kicking and punching in my womb brought me a feeling of joy like I had never felt before. Feeling my baby so full of life made me appreciate even more the precious gift of human life as a gift from God, a life that begins in the womb and that must be protected and respected in society. My husband and I found in the *Rite for the Blessing of a Child in the Womb* an abundance of prayers and blessings to accompany our baby during gestation and before Baptism. It was a way to lead him into our Catholic faith from his early weeks of life, or "an opportunity of first evangelization."

Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville, Kentucky, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and co-author of the blessing, calls it an opportunity of first evangelization of the child and evangelization of the family, and he sees it as a way of "reaching out to people on the margins, especially women who are pregnant, especially if they're distant from Christ, distant from the Church," he told Catholic News Service.

The *Rite for the Blessing of a Child in the Womb* can be done by a priest or deacon and is available in English and Spanish. The rite opens with readings of the Visitation, the Annunciation, the prophecy of Sarah's conception of Isaac, or other similar readings. It includes a blessing for the mother to "grant her comfort in all anxiety and make her determined to lead her child along the ways of salvation," the text reads. And there is a blessing for the father to "grant him courage in this new responsibility, and make him an example of justice and truth for this child." An excerpt of the blessing reads:

God, author of all life,
bless, we pray, this unborn child;
give constant protection
and grant a healthy birth
that is the sign of our rebirth one day
into the eternal rejoicing of heaven.

This blessing represents a wonderful opportunity, through prayer, to connect with the unborn child, not only if one is close or distant from God, but also for those who seek blessings for their unborn child or for those who may face health challenges during their pregnancies.

After my child was blessed, a feeling of peace and serenity came into my heart for the weeks that followed. It was a reminder that God was watching over us. Our baby was born less than three weeks later and has been the greatest blessing in our lives.

Norma Montenegro Flynn is assistant director of Media Relations at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. This article first appeared on the USCCBlog.