

A Mission Church

Baptism: The Gift of Life

The Mission of the Church has always been simple: Make known the life and love of our God made manifest through Jesus Christ. The difficulty for every man and woman has been in living in this life and love of God.

In the "subject index" of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, there are two full columns concerning the sacrament of Baptism. Why? Because baptism is the "foundation of Christian life." The life of Jesus Christ, the life of our God, is made known to us through this sacrament, this giving of our God. Through the Holy Spirit, the love of the Father and the Son, we are given an indwelling of God. Grace upon grace now flows to us so that we may find pleasing and desirous the salvation won for us through the death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

That's an awful lot to grasp!

It is also why adults seeking this very sacrament spend much time in understanding its fullness, and in preparation for living it. It is why parents of newborn children are so closely scrutinized that it not be taken lightly. We're talking of being joined in a way that far exceeds the union found in the old covenant symbolized thru the old law of circumcision. The Fourth Gospel of the New Testament, which we know as that of St. John's, refers to Jesus instructing Nicodemus of the need for all people to be baptized.

"Jesus answered and said to him (Nicodemus), 'Amen, amen, I say to you no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above ...Amen, amen I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.'" (Jn. 3:4-5)

Just as water is that rich symbol of cleansing, of removal of transgressions and sin, so too, the Spirit is that reality that pours new life into the one with a

heart set on conversion, on being joined to the kingdom of God. Baptism acknowledges the goodness of God found in the one created by God; removes the effect of original sin; forgives sins; enters the individual into the Body of Christ (the Church); provides the virtues of a holy life; points to salvation, a perfect gift; and animates this life with the very life of the Blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit.



The mission of the Church has always been to bring all people to oneness with God through Jesus Christ. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them all that I commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Mt 28:19-20)

The Word of God, manifested when the Word became flesh and made its dwelling among us (Jn. 1:14), is, by the work of a cross, now the means of our salvation. We can see in Isaiah (55:10-11) how Jesus is the fulfillment of the Father's plan. Jesus has achieved the end for which he, the Word, was sent. Those who seek the kingdom must also be ready to live the fullness of life now being shared.

Some of your friends or family members may speak against the saving effects of the sacrament of baptism. In the Acts of the Apostles (2:37-39) St. Peter is very clear about the fact that "baptism now saves you."

"Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, 'What are we to do, brothers?' Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit for the promise is made to you and to your children and to all those far off, whomever the Lord our God will call.'"

Salvation can only come through Jesus Christ. Those who would think otherwise are misguided, and need to seek proper instruction in the faith. What we

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do with this gift of life in Jesus Christ is important for our salvation, ergo our need for the other sacraments which are signs of God calling us back to the life of Christ given in baptism.

Ministers of the Sacrament

The normal ministers of the sacrament of Baptism are an ordained priest or deacon of the Church.

Laitia may administer the sacrament of baptism in the case of an emergency and the lack of a priest or deacon. This is most often experienced in a hospital and at the birth of a child experiencing severe difficulties. A priest or deacon should be called immediately.

This may be true for an adult as well who desires baptism but suddenly has a life-threatening situation.

If the adult/child survives the medical emergency, the full ritual of baptism should be provided by a priest or deacon at a later date.

Grandparents and others, anxious about a person not being baptized for whatever reason (this happens most with newborns), cannot take it upon themselves to baptize the person, adult or infant. It is always considered a serious matter when a person attempts to replicate a sacramental form.

The Full Ritual of Baptism

The fullness of the ritual of the sacrament of Baptism is rich in symbolism and deep in spiritual awakening. It includes:

- the welcome provided by the Church
- the signing of the child “I claim you for Christ our Savior” spoken by the minister
- the reading of scripture
- the intercession of the communion of saints
- the Anointing with the Oil of the Catechumen, that is, the exorcism which calls upon the Holy Spirit to strengthen this person against the effects of original sin and to bring the person into the fullness of grace
- the blessing of water
- profession of faith made by parents and godparents on behalf of the child (these are spoken by the person when confirmed)
- the essential rite of baptizing “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”



- anointing with sacred Chrism reminding us we now share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly ministries of Jesus Christ,
- the white garment, the outward sign of our Christian dignity
- the Light of Christ taken from the Paschal Candle
- The Lord’s Prayer
- final blessing on parents and all present

Role of the Godparent

Can a member of the Elks sponsor someone in the local Moose Lodge? Can an inactive member of any organization sponsor someone in any organization? No, only active members can sponsor others as members, with the hope that these new members will become active in the life of that organization. It only makes sense that the same be true for those being asked to fulfill the role of a Godparent.

The role of the Godparent is to provide the baptized person another example of an adult deeply rooted in living his/her faith.

The Godparent must be a Catholic who actively participates in the life of the Church and who knows the faith well enough to give

insight, answer questions, and be a role model for the baptized person throughout life. The role of a Godparent is never-ending. If his/her role is done well, the godparent should be the one asked to be the Confirmation sponsor. Only one Godparent is required at the time of baptism.

A parent may not be a Godparent.

Catholics not practicing their faith, or unable to do so because of choices (not being married by a priest, as an example) they have made, cannot be considered for baptism.

Christian Witnesses

These are persons baptized in another Christian faith expression (not baptized Catholic), who should be practicing their faith and willing to support the baptized person in the practice of the Catholic faith. These persons give witness to Jesus Christ in their lives much the same as a Godparent would do.

Other Scriptural Texts Supportive of Baptism

- Mark 16:15-16
- Acts 16:30-33
- Acts 22:16
- Romans 6:2-4
- 1 Corinthians 6:11

- Colossians 2:11-14
- Titus 3:3-7
- Hebrews 10:21-22
- 1 Peter 3:18-21