

The Sacrament of Baptism

We become members of Christ and the Church through the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist.

The Old Testament has many images of water that help us understand Baptism. Each year during the Easter Vigil, the water that will be used in baptism is blessed. The prayers of blessing call these images to mind. At the time of Creation, the Spirit breathed upon the waters (Genesis 1:2). During the great Exodus the waters of the Red Sea parted, allowing the people of Israel to cross from slavery to freedom (Exodus 14: 21 – 31). Later, in the New Testament, John the Baptist administered a baptism of repentance to Jesus in the waters of the River Jordan (Mark 1: 1 – 11).

Knowing that Baptism is necessary for salvation, parents have their babies baptized not long after they are born. Baptism signifies the baby's entrance into the Church. The community of believers and the parents make a commitment to care for and teach this child as he or she is raised in the Catholic faith.

In the early Church infant baptism was not the usual way that people became members of God's family. Initiation into the Church was primarily done for adults. They had to enter into a long period of learning and praying with the Christian community. Adults seeking to enter the Church today normally enter into the process of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as catechumens. During this process they learn what God has done through Jesus, the teachings of the Church, and how they may respond in faith to God's call.

In the celebration of Baptism, a person is immersed in water. He or she goes all the way into the water and then comes out. This action is a symbol of dying to sin and rising to new life in Christ. Sometimes water is poured over a person's head. The celebrant proclaims "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

The person being baptized is anointed with two oils; the oil of catechumens is put on the chest, and chrism is put on the top of the head. Oil is a symbol of strength and healing.

A candle is lit during the celebration. This shows that the person baptized is asked to keep the flame of faith alive in his or her heart.

Through Baptism a person receives forgiveness of original sin as well as personal sins. The newly baptized person receives sanctifying grace and is sealed with a permanent spiritual mark. This is why Baptism can be celebrated only once.

St. Paul the Apostle wrote about the change that takes place in a baptized person in Romans 6: 3–4. Paul explained that in Baptism Christians are united with the death of Jesus – they are in a sense buried with him. Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. United with Christ believers also rise from the dead to live in newness of life.

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The Celebration of the Christian Mystery Section Two
The Seven Sacraments of the Church
CHAPTER ONE : THE SACRAMENTS OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION
ARTICLE 1 : THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

FAITH AND BAPTISM

1253 Baptism is the sacrament of faith. 54 But faith needs the community of believers. It is only within the faith of the Church that each of the faithful can believe. The faith required for Baptism is not a perfect and mature faith, but a beginning that is called to develop. The catechumen or the godparent is asked: "What do you ask of God's Church?" The response is: "Faith!"

1254 For all the baptized, children or adults, faith must grow after Baptism. For this reason the Church celebrates each year at the Easter Vigil the renewal of baptismal promises. Preparation for Baptism leads only to the threshold of new life. Baptism is the source of that new life in Christ from which the entire Christian life springs forth.

1255 For the grace of Baptism to unfold, the parents' help is important. So too is the role of the godfather and godmother , who must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized - child or adult on the road of Christian life. 55 Their task is a truly ecclesial function (officium). 56 The whole ecclesial community bears some responsibility for the development and safeguarding of the grace given at Baptism.

THE NECESSITY OF BAPTISM

1257 The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation. 60 He also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptize them. 61 Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament. 62 The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are "reborn of water and the Spirit." God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.

1261 As regards children who have died without Baptism , the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus' tenderness toward children which caused him to say: "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them," 64 allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism. All the

more urgent is the Church's call not to prevent little children coming to Christ through the gift of holy Baptism.

THE GRACE OF BAPTISM

For the forgiveness of sins . . .

1263 By Baptism all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin.

66 In those who have been reborn nothing remains that would impede their entry into the Kingdom of God, neither Adam's sin, nor personal sin, nor the consequences of sin, the gravest of which is separation from God.

"A new creature"

1265 Baptism not only purifies from all sins, but also makes the neophyte "a new creature," an adopted son of God, who has become a "partaker of the divine nature," 69 member of Christ and co-heir with him, 70 and a temple of the Holy Spirit. 71

Incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ

1267 Baptism makes us members of the Body of Christ: "Therefore . . . we are members one of another."

72 Baptism incorporates us into the Church . From the baptismal fonts is born the one People of God of the New Covenant, which transcends all the natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races, and sexes: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body." 73

The sacramental bond of the unity of Christians

1271 Baptism constitutes the foundation of communion among all Christians, including those who are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church: "For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in some, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church. Justified by faith in Baptism, [they] are incorporated into Christ; they therefore have a right to be called Christians, and with good reason are accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church." 81 "Baptism therefore constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are reborn." 82

An indelible spiritual mark . . .

1272 Incorporated into Christ by Baptism, the person baptized is configured to Christ. Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark (character) of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark, even if sin prevents Baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation. 83 Given once for all, Baptism cannot be repeated.

The Role of Godparents

As you begin to prepare for your child's Baptism, you are invited to reflect on the role and selection of a godmother and godfather. There are various customs and traditions that shape our understanding of the role and importance of godparents.

Prior to inviting a relative or close friend to assume the role of godparent it is important to understand what our church teaches.

- A godparent is to be at least sixteen years of age and have celebrated the sacraments of initiation in the Catholic Church (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist).
- The godparent is to be able and willing to enthusiastically profess his or her faith during the rite of Baptism and ready to model a Catholic Christian lifestyle. Naturally weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist is a hallmark of a Catholic Christian life. (Canon 874)
- The child may have one or two godparents. The child does not have more than two godparents. If two godparents are chosen, one is to be a man and the other a woman. (Canon 873)
- A Christian from another denomination may act as a Christian witness, however, it is necessary to have one Catholic godparent. You may have only one Christian witness. (Canon 874)
- A Christian witness is a baptized Christian and a member of a non-Catholic ecclesial community. (e.g. Anglican, United, Presbyterian, etc.)

The role of the godparent should not be confused with that of a legal guardian. The relationship is spiritually based not legally based. Parents are invited to make their choice of godparents with the following in mind.

Inviting someone to be a godparent implies the following:

- ❖ **A request** by the parents for the assistance of the Christian community in general and the individual godparents in particular in raising their child in the Catholic faith.
- ❖ **An admission** by the parents of their awareness that they need this assistance.
- ❖ **An affirmation** of the faith of the individuals invited to be godparents and a challenge to them to witness their faith.
- ❖ **A statement** by the parents that they want their child to be positively influenced by the faith and lives of the people they have invited.

- ❖ **A reminder** to the entire community that it has a shared responsibility to support each of its members.

Godparents “must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized - child or adult - on the road of Christian life. Their task is a truly ecclesial (church) function.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1255)

Prior to the Second Vatican Council and the revision and renewal of our sacramental rites during the Baptism of an infant, the godparents were asked to answer for the infant in rejecting Satan and professing faith. The 1989 **Rite of Baptism for Children** asks the parents and godparents to renew their own rejection of evil and to profess their faith so that they may offer these to nurture and foster the faith of the growing child.

In reflection upon the responsibilities of a godparent, it is apparent that what is asked of the godparent is really the mission each of us as Christians accepted as a part of our own Baptism. All of the baptized are to nurture faith and reach out to others in faith throughout our lives.

The godparent is to be a model, guide and witness for your child as he or she grows in faith. It is good when a godparent lives close to the family and is able to visit throughout the year. Before you invite someone, a relative or friend, to be your child's godparent you are encouraged to spend time in prayer seeking guidance and wisdom.

Godparents for Life

To be given to the godparent

Congratulations! The relationship between a godchild and godparent is unique and lifelong. You are embarking on a special journey, one that will last years.

On the day of Baptism the Church asks the godparent if he or she is ready to assist the parents in raising the child in the practice of the faith. The role of the godparent is not limited to the day of Baptism. The Church invites you to be an active presence in the life of your godchild.

Weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist is foundational to our lives as Catholics. Weekly participation in the Sunday Eucharist is the centre of our lives. As a godparent you will model what it means to live as a Catholic Christian.

Some Suggestions

The following suggestions may assist you in your role as godparent.

- ❖ Pray for your godchild each day.
- ❖ Regular visits with your godchild are encouraged.
- ❖ Begin a sacramental scrapbook for your godchild. Later you can work on it together.
- ❖ Write a letter to your godchild telling him or her how you felt on the day of the Baptism. Keep the letter until the child is older.
- ❖ Send a letter or a visit each year on the anniversary of your godchild's Baptism.
- ❖ Whenever possible the godparent and the godchild should participate in the Sunday liturgy and other liturgical celebrations together.
- ❖ It is important for the godparent to continue to grow in his or her faith therefore take advantage of retreats, special workshops or presentations.

As you journey with your godchild may both of you discover more and more about the mystery of God's abiding love.

Parent's Prayer

God, our Creator and loving parent,
thank you for the gift of life.
Cherish me as your child,
and fill my life with the creative power of your love.

Jesus, our saviour and brother,
thank you for showing me the way of love.
Be with me as I try to be like you -
patient, supportive and gentle with my child.
Let me share again the delight and wonder of childhood,
of discovering your face in the little things:
in the vivid petals of a flower,
in the measured movement of the caterpillar,
in the comfort of loving arms around me when I fall.

Spirit of God, our constant friend and guide,
thank you for leading me in the way of faith.
Help me to show my child the loving face of God
during our life together.
Let me bring healing
in times of pain and doubt.
Help me care for my child
materially and spiritually,
and let us always be friends and believers together.

God – Creator, Saviour and Spirit,
you have trusted me with my child's life.
Help us grow together in all that is good and right.
Be with us in times of joy and in moments of pain.
Let us know that you are there for us,
even when we seem to lose sight of you.
Please be light and warmth in our home and in our hearts. Amen.

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