

Introduction

Jesus instructed his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to baptize all people. Our Lord also makes clear that Baptism is necessary for salvation (John 3:5). Faithful to this commandment the Church welcomes individuals into communion with Christ through Baptism. The sacrament marks the entry into a life of faith. The newly-baptized person assumes the responsibility of living a holy life and, particularly in the case of an infant, this will require the support of other members of the Christian community. Baptism is birth into the new life in Christ. In accordance with the Lord's will, it is necessary for salvation, as is the Church herself, which we enter by Baptism.

[Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1277] The meaning and grace of the sacrament of Baptism are evident in the rites of its celebration. The ceremony begins with the family being welcomed by the celebrant on behalf of the Church. The priest or deacon enquires of the parents the name they have given their baby and he also asks them if they accept the undertaking of raising the child in the Christian faith. The following gestures and words are important parts of the unfolding celebration:

- The sign of the Cross – this marks the imprint of Christ. The celebrant, parents and godparents greet the candidate by tracing the sign of the cross on its forehead. This signifies that the child is going to belong to Christ.
- Proclamation of the Word of God – reveals the truth of God to those gathered. Prayer is important since Baptism marks the candidate's entry into the life of faith.
- Exorcism – signifies our liberation from sin. Baptism is made necessary by Original Sin and so the celebrant prays that the child may be delivered from every evil. Anointing with the Oil of Baptism supplements this prayer and is a sign of the strength to be derived from Christ.
- Profession of Faith – in the case of an infant the parents will renew their Baptismal Promises. Parents recite these on behalf of the candidate just as their own parents did for them. The vows are an important reminder of the obligation to raise the child as a faithful Christian.
- Baptismal Water – this has been consecrated through the power of the Holy Spirit so those baptized in it will be born of water and the Spirit. Ordinarily the water used will have been blessed at the Easter Vigil.
- Baptism – this is the essential rite of the sacrament. It consists of triple infusion with water accompanied by the invocation of each person of the Most Holy Trinity. The priest or deacon will pour the baptismal water over the child's head three times, saying: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."
- Anointing with sacred chrism – signifies the gift of the Holy Spirit and anticipates future Confirmation. Chrism translates as the "anointed one" and so the child is now enrolled in the Church, the Body of Christ, and is tasked with the role of living as a Christian.
- White garment – the baptized person has "put on Christ", has risen with Him. The infant is wrapped in the garment to signify he or she is newly clothed in Christ and is ready to be His witness in the world.
- Candle – usually the father or a godparent will be given a candle to light from the paschal candle. This signifies that the baptized are now "the light of the world" and that the light of Christ will radiate in and through their lives.
- First Holy Communion – this is reserved for older children but for infants the connection is made through recitation of the "Our Father" before the altar.
- Solemn blessing – the celebration of Baptism concludes with special blessings for each parent and for all who have participated in the joyous occasion.

Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: "Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word."

[Catechism of the Catholic Church, n.1213]

Â

According to the Apostle Paul, the believer enters through Baptism into communion with Christ's death, is buried with him, and rises with him: Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

[Catechism of the Catholic Church, n.1227] The immersion in water (baptism properly speaking) signifies the candidate's burial into Christ's death from which he rises up by resurrection with him. There is death and purification followed by regeneration and renewal. The graces conferred upon the newly-baptized include: The forgiveness of all sins. Membership of the Body of Christ. The indelible spiritual mark of belonging to Christ. (Baptism can only be received once). The fruit of Baptism, or baptismal grace, is a rich reality that includes forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins, birth into the new life by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. By this very fact the person baptized is incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, and made a sharer in the priesthood of Christ.

[Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1279] Adults We have been blessed in the parish by the reception of some mature adults into the faith. Unlike newborns, their preparation to enter the Church should involve readiness to receive all the sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. This is part of the wider Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA). Infants Most baptisms in the parish are at the request of parents of newly-born children. Baptism is a sacrament of faith, performed in the midst of a community of believers. Faith inevitably matures and grows after baptism. This is especially so when the candidate is a child. It is particularly important in this case that the grace received at baptism develops and is safeguarded. In this task the commitment, support and guidance of the parents along with the godfather and godmother (who must be firm believers) are essential.

Â