

The Sacrament of Baptism - Preparation

The Sacrament of Baptism is often called "The door of the Church," because it is the first of the seven sacraments not only in time (since most Catholics receive it as infants) but in priority, since the reception of the other sacraments depends on it. It is the first of the three Sacraments of Initiation, the other two being the Sacrament of Confirmation and the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Once baptized, a person becomes a member of the Church. Traditionally, the rite (or ceremony) of baptism was held outside the doors of the main part of the church, to signify this fact.

The Necessity of Baptism:

Christ Himself ordered His disciples to preach the Gospel to all nations and to baptize those who accept the message of the Gospel. In His encounter with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), Christ made it clear that baptism was necessary for salvation: "Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." For Catholics, the sacrament is not a mere formality; it is the very mark of a Christian, because it brings us into new life in Christ.

The Baptism of Desire:

That doesn't mean that only those who have been formally baptized can be saved. From very early on, the Church recognized that there are two other types of baptism besides the baptism of water.

The baptism of desire applies both to those who, while wishing to be baptized, die before receiving the sacrament and "Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do His will as they know it through the dictates of conscience" (Constitution on the Church, Second Vatican Council).

The Baptism of Blood:

The baptism of blood is similar to the baptism of desire. It refers to the martyrdom of those believers who were killed for

the faith before they had a chance to be baptized. This was a common occurrence in the early centuries of the Church, but also in later times in missionary lands. The baptism of blood has the same effects as the baptism of water.

The Form of the Sacrament:

While the Church has an extended rite of Baptism which is normally celebrated, which includes roles for both parents and godparents, the essentials of that rite are two: the pouring of water over the head of the person to be baptized (or the immersion of the person in water); and the words "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Infant Baptism:

In the Catholic Church today, baptism is most commonly administered to infants. While some other Christians strenuously object to infant baptism, believing that baptism requires assent on the part of the person being baptized, the Eastern Orthodox, Anglicans, Lutherans, and other mainline Protestants also practice infant baptism, and there is evidence that it was practiced from the earliest days of the Church.

Since baptism removes both the guilt and the punishment due to Original Sin, delaying baptism until a child can understand the sacrament may put the child's salvation in danger, should he die unbaptized.

The Effects of the Sacrament: Baptism has six primary effects, which are all supernatural graces:

The removal of the guilt of both Original Sin (the sin imparted to all mankind by the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden) and **personal sin** (the sins that we have committed ourselves).

The remission of all punishment that we owe because of sin, both temporal (in this world and in Purgatory) and eternal (the punishment that we would suffer in hell). **The infusion of grace in the form of sanctifying grace** (the life of God within

us); the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit; and the three theological virtues.

Becoming a part of Christ. Becoming a part of the Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ on earth.

Enabling participation in the sacraments and the growth in grace.

Christian Responsibilities of a Godparent

1. Pray for your godchild regularly
2. Set an example of Christian living
3. Help him/her to grow in the faith of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
4. Give every encouragement to follow Christ and fight against evil

The role of Godparent we may describe as a "supporting friend" who assists the parents and takes a special interest in the child, Your chief responsibility is to support your godchild in living a Christian life in fellowship with the Church. You are promising to do all in your power to support him/her in his/her life in Christ." The best way to do this is to help make sure he/she gets to Church regularly. Setting an example by regular Church attendance and by being willing to take your godchild with you to worship is a great witness and a fine way to keep your oath as a Sponsor

B. PARENTS

- It is the responsibility of the parents to request baptism as soon as possible after the birth or before the birth of their child. They should go to their parish priest or his delegate to request the sacrament for their child. (Cf. CIC, can. 867)

3. In an intact marriage, at least one parent/legal guardian should be a baptized Catholic.

The non-Catholic parent must be willing to allow his/her child to be baptized in the Catholic Church. The sacrament should not be celebrated if the non-Catholic parent expresses strong opposition because the event of the sacrament should not

divide the family. In cases where there is opposition, pastoral counseling should present options for future celebration of the sacrament when conditions are more favorable.

4. In case of divorce, the custodial parent may seek baptism. Civil law defines "custodial parent" as the one who at that moment has physical custody of the child.

5. Although the rite is insistent on the preparation of parents/guardians, none of the following may be made requirements for baptism of a child:

- a. Convalidation of an invalid marriage
- b. Any demonstrations of financial support, e.g., envelopes.
- c. Any other obligation not found in Church law concerning baptism. (CIC 868 1.1)

6. According to the precepts of Canon Law (CIC 857 2), parents requesting Baptism of their child should ordinarily be members of the parish. With special permission of their pastor they may request Baptism in another parish.

7. Baptism shall not be refused to parents who have no permanent domicile. People without a parish, e.g. migrants and transients, are to be the objects of special solicitude and need Baptism

9 to be dealt with in the best pastoral way possible. Special care should be taken in each individual case.

C. GODPARENTS

1. "Each child may have a godfather and a godmother, the word 'godparents' is used in the rite to describe both." (*Rite of Baptism for Children 6*)

2. Only one godparent is necessary. The godparent must be a fully initiated Catholic (baptized, confirmed, received eucharist), at least 16 years old, and must be leading a sacramental life in harmony with the church. (Cf. CIC, can. 874) The godparent should be willing to accept the responsibility of assisting the parents in developing the faith life of the child.

3. The godparent may not be the father or the mother of the one to be baptized. (Cf. CIC, can. 874)

4. Although people of some cultures sometimes choose multiple godparents, only two names can actually be entered in the Baptismal Register. (*CIC, can. 873*)

5. A baptized and believing Christian from a separated church or community may act as a Christian witness at the request of the parents, but there must be a Catholic godparent.

(*Cf. CIC, can. 874.*)

6. Godparents should be invited and encouraged to attend Baptismal Preparation in order to better understand their role as godparents. If they are from another parish, a letter of recommendation from their pastor is required.

7. Any person may serve as a proxy if the godparent is unable to be physically present at the baptism. The Church requires no specific stipulations regarding who may serve as a proxy.