

SACRAMENTAL THEOLOGY: Class 2

Sacraments of Initiation: Overview

Baptism (CCC, 1214-1228; 1276-1277): The word baptism comes from a Greek word that means "to plunge" or "to immerse" into water. This symbolic drawing and drawing up again from the water reminds us that a new Catholic enters into Christ's Death and then rises to a new life of grace.

The Sacrament of Baptism has its roots in Scripture. The Old Testament foreshadows this sacrament. For example, in the creation account in Genesis, the Spirit of God overshadows the waters to bring life to the earth. This prefigures how today the Holy Spirit imparts new life at Baptism. Another Old Testament example comes in the story of the renewal of the earth following the Great Flood (see Gn 9). The New Testament tells how Jesus himself was baptized (see, for example, Mt 3:13-17). Also, before ascending to Heaven, Jesus commanded:

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 to observe all that I have commanded you. (Mt 28:19-20) Beginning with the Day of Pentecost, the Church has preached the need for Baptism. Through Baptism, Catholics participate in the Death, burial, and Resurrection of Christ.

Infant Baptism (CCC, 1234-1245, 1250-1256; 1278; 1282; 1284): The Church has baptized infants from its earliest days. The practice of infant Baptism shows that Salvation is a pure gift of Christ's grace that extends even to children. The practice of infant Baptism makes clear that the Church relies on the faith of the parents, godparents, and all the Church to ensure that infants are baptized in a faith-filled environment where they learn about the faith they have received.

Most infant Baptisms take place on Sunday, often as part of the Sunday liturgy. Even when not held as part of Mass, Baptisms should always take place in a company of believers. The rite of Baptism begins with a greeting from the ordinary minister of the sacrament (priest, deacon, or bishop). The baptismal rite includes an instruction to the parents and godparents to raise the child in a Christian home, a welcoming of the child, a proclamation of God's Word, and prayers of exorcism to free the child from sin and Satan's power. The child is anointed with the Oil of

Catechumens to proclaim that he or she is to be joined to Christ, the Anointed One. After the baptismal waters are blessed, those assembled recite their baptismal vows, and the parents and godparents state that they desire Baptism for their child. Next comes the essential rite of Baptism: the minister pours water on the head of the child three times (or immerses the child in water three times) and pronounces the words, "N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

After the baptism, the crown of the head is anointed a second time with sacred Chrism (perfumed oil), a white garment is placed upon the child, and a lit candle is held by one of the parents. The Priest/Deacon touches the ears and mouth of the child and prays that the child will hear the Gospel and proclaim God's word. Everyone recites the Lord's Prayer, after which the celebrant concludes the ceremony by blessing the parents and everyone assembled.

The various symbols used in Baptism reveal important spiritual truths about its meaning:

- Water. Water represents cleansing. It also symbolizes death to an old life of sin and rebirth into a new life with Christ Jesus. Jesus told Nicodemus that Jesus himself was living water, the source of all life. In Baptism we are reborn to a new life with Jesus Christ. Original Sin is washed away, and we inherit eternal life as adopted children of God.
- Oil. In the ancient world, oil was used to anoint kings and queens to show that they were set apart from others. The natural symbol of oil also represents healing and protection. The title Christ means "anointed one." The oils of Baptism (Chrism) represent that we have been anointed in Jesus. We belong to him. We share in his Life and Salvation. We receive the Holy Spirit, who protects, guides, and strengthens us. We also share in Christ's priestly and kingly ministries, sent by him to preach the Good News of God's Kingdom. We also help him in his healing ministry by serving others, especially the poor in our midst, and by working toward the unity of a wounded human community.
- White garment. When early Christians came out of the baptismal pool, they donned new white robes to represent rising with Christ. Today, the white

cloth symbolizes "putting on Christ" (Gal 3:27). It is a symbol of purity, happiness, and a new identity of living in union with the Lord.

- Candle. The baptismal candle, lit from the Easter candle, reminds us how Christ is the light of the world and that his followers should be Christ's light to others.

Effects of Baptism (ccc, 1262-1274, 1279-1280): The Sacrament of Baptism is the gateway to the Church and the reception of the other sacraments. It has many effects, including:

- Baptism forgives both Original Sin and personal sin and remits all punishment due to sin. However, some consequences of sin remain, for example, suffering, weakness of character, inclination to sin (traditionally called concupiscence), and death.
- Baptism gives us birth into a new life in Christ. It makes us children of God and temples of the Holy Spirit.
- Baptism confers sanctifying grace, the grace of justification. This enables us to believe, hope, and love. Baptism also brings the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's gifts that enable us to grow in holiness and goodness.
- Baptism initiates and incorporates us into Christ's Body, the Church. It empowers us to share in Christ's priestly ministry of worship and service. Baptism joins us to all Christians, even to those who are not yet fully united to the Catholic Church.
- Baptism seals Christians with an indelible spiritual character that marks us as belonging to Christ-This is why Baptism can be received only once and should never be given to someone who has already been baptized. This baptismal character consecrates us for Christian worship and binds us to the Lord. If we live our baptismal promises, Christ has promised a resurrected body and a life of happiness with God and all his people forever.

Can unbaptized babies be saved?: Baptism is necessary for Salvation because Jesus himself said to the Pharisee Nicodemus, "Amen, amen I say to you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above" (Jn 3:3). Traditionally the Church has taught that there are three forms of Baptism: baptism of water (through the Sacrament of Baptism), baptism of blood (the death of martyrs who died for their faith before being baptized), and baptism of desire. Baptism of desire

refers to catechumens who die before receiving the sacrament. Their turning from sin, desire to be baptized, and life of charity assure them of the Salvation the sacrament conveys. Baptism of desire also applies to all those good people who have not been given the gift of faith but whose lives show that they would have accepted Jesus Christ had they been given the chance on earth to know him.

The Church trusts that God's infinite and mysterious mercy will touch unbaptized babies because God wants everyone to be saved. Jesus himself showed tender love to children (Mk 10:14). However, since Divine Revelation does not specifically address the question of unbaptized infants, the Church asks parents to baptize their infants as soon as possible.