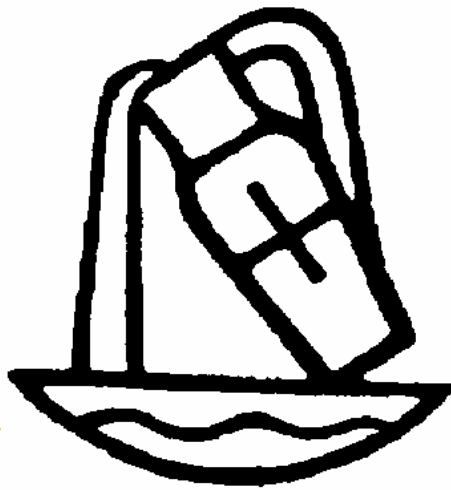


St. Theresa



Baptism Preparation

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What is Baptism?

Baptism is the first sacrament received and it is called, along with Confirmation and Eucharist, a Sacrament of Christian Initiation. This sacrament lays the very foundation of the Christian life. *Baptism* means a “plunging or immersion into the water symbolizing a burial into Christ’s death and arising as a new creature as in Christ’s resurrection” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1214). It is also called the washing of regeneration and renewal, because in the case of adults, not only original sin but also personal sins are removed completely through the sacrament (*Catechism*, #1215).

What are the effects of Baptism?

The effects of Baptism are truly monumental: The individual is filled with the presence of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Because all sin—original and personal, if any—is taken away completely, the individual has a complete and fresh start in his or her spiritual life. Also, the person becomes an adoptive child of God, a member of the Body of Christ and a Temple of the Holy Spirit. By this fact, he or she is incorporated in the Church, the Body of Christ, and is made a sharer in the priesthood of Christ. Finally, Baptism imprints on the soul an indelible sign, the character (a kind of identity) that consecrates a person for Christian worship (thus, Baptism is never repeated).

It is significant that the Church sees Baptism as a gift of God, as is faith. That is why we have no hesitation in baptizing infants though they may not be conscious of what is happening. As they grow, they will make many acts of faith in God, in the Eucharist and more, and respond to the gift of God’s life they received as infants.

What else is notable about Baptism?

We believe that Baptism is necessary for salvation because of Jesus' own words: "No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit" (Jn 3:5). However, the Church also rightly teaches that while God binds salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, he himself is not bound by the sacraments (*Catechism*, #1257). The reason for this is that God would never bind anyone to do what is impossible. In other words, we cannot place limits on the unlimited mercy and compassion of God. It is God's will that all people be saved, including those who were not able to receive Baptism. The Church confidently places them in God's mercy and love. Remember Jesus' own words, "Let the children come to me, do not prevent them" (Mk 10:14).

. Even those who, through no fault of their own, cannot come to know Christ, but seek the truth and do the will of God in accordance with his (or her) understanding of it, can be saved (*Catechism*, #1258-1260). This is called Baptism of Desire, and includes the desire of parents whose children die before they are able to be baptized. There are also those who, while not baptized in water, suffer death for the faith and receive the Baptism of Blood. It is important to note that the Church sees salvation open to all by means of one of these three forms of Baptism.

Some Christian denominations by their doctrines indicate salvation for very few people. Our faith opens the possibility of salvation to all. "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3:17 ff). John speaks of the whole world. God wants everyone saved! It is, after all, the reason for which he created every person.

The Sacrament of Baptism initiates us into our journey of life with God. It is God who leads and God who guides, and God who waits to embrace us for all eternity.

Choosing a Godparent

A godparent serves a special role for one to be baptized, whether it be a child or an adult. Godparents are to represent the Christian Catholic community, the Church. They are to assist in the preparation of adult candidates for Baptism and to be supportive of them afterwards. When it comes to infant Baptism, godparents are to assist the child's parents in raising their child in our Catholic faith, so that the child may profess and live it as an adult.

Thus if we remember a few basic things about Baptism—it gives a person both a new and special status as a child of God and it makes a person a member of the Body of Christ, the Church—then what you are looking for are godparents who can truly represent that Christian community. Basically this means you want at least one active and committed Catholic. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states "...the godfather and godmother... must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized—child or adult—on the road of Christian life" (#1255). This is the Church's way of saying that being a godparent is truly a ministry in the Church, and not simply an honor.

In fact the whole Church community or parish bears some responsibility for the development and nurturing of the grace given your child at Baptism.



Criteria for Godparents

Godparents accept to cooperate in the spiritual life and development of their godchild. They represent "the expansion of the spiritual family of the one to be baptized and the role of the Church as a parent. As occasion offers, the godparent helps the parents to lead the child to profess the faith and to show this by living it. "(Code of Canon Law [CIC] #872). As such, the Church requires certain criteria in selecting godparents.

The following are criteria to be considered in choosing godparents: (CIC #874)

1. Have completed the 16th year.
2. Be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the Sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist and leads a life in harmony with the faith and the role to be undertaken.
3. Not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared.
4. Not be the Father or mother of the one to be baptized.
5. A baptized non-Catholic may also act as a sponsor along with a Catholic sponsor.

Baptism and babies

All of this is pretty heady stuff, especially when considered in light of baptizing babies. The largest percentage of Baptisms in our Church are still infant Baptisms, even though the process of faith and conversion is essentially an adult experience: thus the great importance of the life long process of learning and living the faith.

So what does all of this mean for those infants?

Obviously, infants cannot respond immediately to the call/response aspect of the sacrament. Nor can an infant understand the change of allegiance, the putting off of the old and putting on of the new, the dying and rising, the new life, or the sharing in the life of Christ. However, the parents of those infants can understand and live those values and pass them on to their children. They can also experience the support of the community in living those ideals, and that is extremely important.

Infant Baptism only makes sense if parents are true Christian disciples. If they are not, then it makes little sense to initiate their children into a Church which calls for a commitment to living the mission of Christ.

The Rite of Baptism for Children emphasizes the importance of faithfulness on the part of parents when it says to parents: In asking to have your children baptized, "you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith." That word *practice* is crucial; it calls for Christian modeling on the part of parents.

Because your responsibility is such a serious one, we ask you to take the time to reflect upon the

Spiritual Rights of the Child:

1. The Right to know and love God.
2. The right to participate in a living community of faith.
3. The right to those needed resources for spiritual growth.
4. The right to religious and moral education from informed parents.
5. The right to hear the Word of God and to have it interpreted.
6. The right to times of silence and solitude to develop a contemplative spirit.
7. The right to active participation in a community of worship.
8. The right to live in a home with faith in God as the heart of daily life.
9. The right to pray freely.
10. The right to be of service to others.

(Written for the International Year of the Child by Ann & Gerry Regan)



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