

Baptism

Baptism is the first sacrament of the church. It comes before all other sacraments. Let's review a few things about sacraments in general.

- What is a sacrament? It is an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace.
- A visible sign. This means that it appeals to our senses and gives direction towards something. A stop sign is a visible sign of an invisible reality that it's good for us to stop ahead.
- They were initiated by Christ Himself. The sacraments were not initiated by the church but by Jesus and if that's true there must be a reason why He did that.
- Why did Christ initiate the sacraments? They are meant to sanctify us (Sanctifying grace), build up the body of Christ (Actual Grace), and to give worship to God.
- There are seven sacraments.
- The sacraments are in three groups of Initiation, Healing, and Service.

Grace

Grace is a free and undeserved gift that God gives us. Here's the key to Grace. Grace shares His divine life with us. Grace gives us the help to live according to His will. Grace doesn't force us to live according to His will but it makes it possible and it helps us. We say that all sacraments give Grace. It's real and it has a real effect. It's not all about symbolism.

Grace is what goes into our soul and heals it from sin. This grace is needed for us to spend eternity in heaven. We receive Grace in Baptism.

All of the sacraments are pointing us and helping us towards salvation. What is salvation? The most important thing is for us to remember that it comes from an outpouring of God's grace. That's the first part. We get to respond (or not) to God's invitation. We choose with our free will whether to accept God's grace. That is our response in faith.

Baptism is the basis for the whole of our Christian life. It comes before all other sacraments.

It is the gateway to a life in the Spirit and the door through which we access the other sacraments.

In Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons and daughters of God. It is the sacrament of regeneration which we'll discuss more later.

The word baptism comes from the Greek which means to plunge or immerse. For the sacrament the plunge symbolizes the burial to sin and a resurrection as a new creature.

The sacrament actually brings about the birth in the Spirit without which we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

Baptism is a gift because it is given to those who bring nothing of their own.

Water has always been known as the source of life. Think of the Red Sea and crossing Jordan river.

When Jesus was at the end of His earthly ministry, He told the apostles to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit showing the importance that He placed on baptism in our salvation.

From the beginning of the church, she has always celebrated the sacrament of Baptism.

In Acts chapter 2 we hear St. Peter telling the crowd "Repent and be baptized and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles offered baptism to anyone who believes in Jesus.

Baptism purifies, justifies, and sanctifies. In Baptism the word of God produces its life-giving effect.

From the beginning becoming a Christian has been a journey. Starting with Proclamation of the Word, acceptance of the Gospel and conversion, profession of faith, Baptism, outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and admission to the Eucharistic communion.

We can see the grace and meaning of the sacrament of baptism in the rite itself. The sign of the cross marks the imprint of Christ on the person being baptized. The proclamation of the Word shows that baptism is the entry way to the life of faith. The person proclaims their faith or parents profess it for their child. The water used is blessed calling down the Holy Spirit so that those baptized will be born of water and the Spirit.

Baptism is performed in the expressive way of either immersion or pouring of water three times in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The white garment symbolizes that the baptized have put on Christ. The candle shows that they are now the light of the world.

Only an unbaptized person can be baptized. As obvious as that seems it means that baptism permanently marks the baptized. It is received only once. If someone has been baptized in another church they are not baptized again when they come into the Catholic church. That is because this isn't a symbolic act. It actually does what it says. There is no need to ever be baptized again.

Why do we baptize?

We are born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin. We need to be freed from the power of darkness and that's why we baptize.

The ministers of baptism are the bishop, priest, and deacon. In an emergency even an unbaptized person with the right intention using the Trinitarian formula can baptize.

Is baptism necessary for salvation?

The answer is yes. The church does not know of any means other than baptism that assures entry into the eternal life with God (CCC 1257). Yet the church also acknowledges God's ability to respond with his great mercy in saying that God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism but He himself is not bound by His sacraments.

The church has also taught that unbaptized martyrs are baptized by their death for Christ. They receive baptism bringing about the fruits of baptism without the sacrament.

For those seeking to be baptized and die before they are baptized, they are considered to have received a baptism of desire that they were not able to receive through the sacrament. Often seen for those in RCIA.

What does baptism accomplish? It purifies us from sin and brings about new life in the Spirit. Like the grandest Reconciliation ever. It is also our entry into the body of Christ and his church.

In Baptism all sins are forgiven as well as all punishment. This is as good as we can get. That's why those who will be baptized on Easter do not receive Reconciliation before Easter.

Baptism gives us sanctifying grace which is needed for us to live our eternal life with God. The other sacraments that give sanctifying grace are reconciliation and Anointing of the sick.

Baptism seals the Christian with an indelible mark of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark even if sin prevents the fruits of baptism from being realized.

INFANT BAPTISM

Baptism frees us from sin (original and actual), makes us adopted sons and daughters of God, and incorporates us into the Church of the Body of Christ.

This brings about the question of the validity of infant baptism which is prominent in the Roman Rite. An infant doesn't possess the knowledge nor has the free will to make a real declaration of faith. Then how can an infant (or any child younger than the age of reason) be baptized?

There are two areas that make the practice of infant baptism seem natural and a part of God's plan for salvation. The first is that baptism is taught to be necessary for salvation as shown in the third chapter of John, "Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit". We also know that God " desires all men to be saved"

(1 Tim 2:4). It logically follows that God desires all to be baptized yet there is the issue of how does the infant express faith.

It is helpful to see if infant baptism was practiced as shown in the scriptures. The answer is not definitive but does illuminate the possibility and provides a gateway to examine the issue of the faith of an infant or minor. We read in the gospel of Luke " People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them, and when the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. Jesus, however, called the children to himself and said, Let the children come to me and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Lk 18:15-16). We also see in the second chapter of Colossians that baptism has replaced circumcision in bringing someone into the community of believers. Since circumcision was for infants, it seems fitting that baptism is also possible for infants by analogy.

St. Hippolytus around 215 AD said "Baptise first the children; and if they can speak for themselves let them do so. Otherwise, let the parents or other relatives speak for them.

Summary: Baptism is the entry into the life of Christ and the church. It proceeds all other sacraments. It takes away all sins (original and actual) and all punishment.