

BAPTISM

Baptism is the gateway to life in the Spirit and the gives access to the other sacraments.

Through baptism we are

1. Freed from sin
2. Reborn as children of God through water and the Holy Spirit
3. We become members of the Body of church
4. We are incorporated into the church and made sharers in her mission

Baptism comes from a Greek word which means 'to plunge'. We are plunged into Christ's death and are raised with Him as a new creature (Bible)

THE RITE ITSELF

Sign of the cross

This marks the imprint of Christ on the one who is going to belong to Him and signifies the grace of the redemption which Christ won for us on the Cross.

The Word of God

The Word of God is read to enlighten the assembly with the revealed Truth, eliciting a response of faith. Baptism is entry into the life of Faith

Prayer of exorcism

Baptism is liberation from sin and the forces of sin. He/she is anointed on the breast with the oil of baptism (oil of catechumens). This oil is a symbol of the strength which the person will receive to help him live a life of faith and counteract sin.

Blessing of the water

The church asks God that through his Son the power of the Holy Spirit may be sent upon the water so that those baptized will be reborn of water and the Holy Spirit as Jesus commanded.

White garment

This garment signifies that the person has clothed himself in Christ. He has become a new creation. The first creation was spoiled by the sin of Adam but Christ the new Adam and Mary the new Eve usher in a new creation.

BAPTISM OF INFANTS

Children, since they are born of a fallen nature and tainted by original Sin, they have need of a new birth in baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the children of God.

The sheer gratuitousness of the grace of baptism is particularly manifest in infant baptism. The Church and the parents would deny the child the priceless grace of

becoming a child of God were they to deny their child baptism.

Infant baptism was a very common occurrence from the second century onwards and even from the beginning children were baptised. 'Whole households being baptised' is mentioned in Scripture. Some of the 'Fathers of the ancient Church' strongly encouraged baptism of children.

Faith and baptism

Baptism is a sacrament of faith. Faith needs the community of believers. Faith required in baptism not yet mature and needs nurturing.

Faith needs to grow and to highlight this, the renewal of baptismal promises by the people takes place at the Easter Vigil each year.

Parents help is vital in the case of infants. They are "the first teachers of their children in the ways of faith". The role of Godfather and Godmother who should be firm believers is to inspire and encourage their godchild in their faith development.

Necessity of Baptism

Baptism is necessary for salvation. The church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into the eternal beatitude and so she stresses the importance of baptism. But God himself is not bound by baptism to bring about the salvation of the person.

Every person outside the Church, who seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved.

The grace of baptism

The two principal effects of baptism are purification from sin and new birth in the Holy Spirit.

In baptism all sins are forgiven i.e. original Sin, personal sin and all punishment from sin – nothing remains which would impede entry into the Kingdom of God

The consequences of sin, however, remain such as suffering, illness and death weakness of character as well as the inclination to sin. But this inclination to sin cannot harm those who do not consent to it. We resist it through the grace of Christ.

A New creature

Baptism makes us a new creature, an adopted child of God and partaker of the divine nature, a member of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit. In baptism we are given the grace of justification enabling us to believe in God, to hope in Him and love Him. These virtues are known as the theological virtues.

Incorporation into the church, the body of Christ.

Baptism incorporates us into the body of Christ, the church. By baptism we share in Christ's prophetic and royal mission. Baptism means that we belong to Christ. We are called to serve people in the communion of the church and to obey the church leadership, holding them in respect and affection. Reborn as children of God the baptised must profess before men the faith they have received from God through the Church and participate in the missionary activity of the church.

An indelible spiritual mark

Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual character of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark even if the sin prevents the baptised person from reaping the fruits of salvation. Baptism cannot be repeated. The baptismal seal enables and commits Christians to serve God by a vital participation in the holy liturgy of the church and to exercise their baptismal priesthood by the witness of a holy life and practical charity.