



## **Understanding the Rite of Catholic Baptism**

The Rite of Baptism, the first of the seven sacraments, is steeped in the history, traditions, and rituals of the Catholic church. It is intended to cleanse away original sin and symbolizes a rebirth in Christ, recalling his baptism by John the Baptist. The ceremony initiates a child (or adult) into the Catholic faith and membership into the church, the holy body of the people of Christ.

### **The Ordinary Form Rite of Baptism**

**There are five main parts:**

1. Reception of the Child
2. Celebration of God's Word
3. Celebration of the Sacrament
4. Explanatory Rites
5. Conclusion of the Rite

Each part of the Catholic baptism ceremony has special significance and meaning.

#### **1. Reception of the Child**

The baptismal sacrament for a child begins with the reception of the child.

The Priest greets the parents and sponsors, reminding them of the child as a gift to them from God, then asks the parents the child's name.

- Enquires of them what they ask of God's church for "name of child," or other such words. The parents might answer, "Baptism."
- Then the priest asks the godparents if they are ready to help the parents in their Christian duty to the child.
- Next, the priest asks the parents, then the godparents, if they accept responsibility for training and raising the child in the practice of the faith.
- The celebrant then welcomes and claims the child "for Christ our Savior by the sign of the cross," making a sign of the cross on the child's forehead and invites the parents and godparents to do the same.

## 2. Celebration of God's Word

### *Scriptural Readings and Homily*

- The celebrant priest reads one or more selections from the gospels, such as John 3:1 - 6 "...unless a man is born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God..."
- The priest then gives a brief homily explaining the significance of the readings and the mystery of baptism and the acceptance of responsibilities by the parents and godparents. The homily might be followed by a period of silent prayer and a hymn.

### *Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful)*

- First, there is prayer for the child, that the Lord Jesus Christ looks on him lovingly and mercifully, bathes him in His light, gives him "the new life of baptism and welcomes him into His holy church," and that the child be a faithful witness to Jesus Christ.
- Next, the priest prays for the parents and godparents to be examples of love and inspiration for the child.
- He then prays for the family and for all present that the Lord will keep them in love and renew the grace of each one's baptism.

### *Invocation of the Saints*

The celebrant invites those present to invoke the saints in succession to, "Pray for us."

- Holy Mary, mother of God
- Saint John the Baptist
- Saint Joseph
- Saint Peter
- Saint Paul

Other saints may be invoked, especially patron saints of the child.

### *Prayer of Exorcism*

The priest asks God to free the child from original sin, for the Holy Spirit to dwell in him, and to strengthen and watch over the child.

### *Anointing Before Baptism*

- Next the priest anoints the child on the breast, tracing a cross with the Oil of Catechumens, or the oil of salvation in Christ.
- He prays for strength for the child "in the power of Christ our Savior," and lays hands on the child in brief silence.

### 3. Celebration of the Sacrament

At the font, either parent may hold the child or, if by tradition there are godparents, one holds the child while the other places her right hand on the child's shoulder during the baptism. The celebration of the sacrament has three parts, including the baptism.

#### *Blessing and Invocation of God Over the Baptismal Water*

The priest makes solemn prayers invoking God and recalling His plan of salvation and the power of water:

- First, there is a reminder in prayer that God uses the sacrament of the water to "pour divine life," and asking God to pour His gift from the baptismal font to the child.
- The priest then recalls the instances of God's grace through water:
  - At the dawn of creation
  - At the great flood
  - At the parting of the Red Sea
  - At the baptism of Jesus in the river of Jordan by John the Baptist
  - At the flowing of water and blood from Jesus' side as he hung on the cross
  - At the call of Jesus to His disciples at His resurrection to go out and teach and baptize all the nations of the world

The priest next asks God's blessing on the water of the font, to make it holy so that the baptized may be cleansed of sin and made holy. The priest touches the water with his right hand and completes a prayer over it.

#### *Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith*

- There is next a call on the parents and godparents to renew their baptism vows and reject Satan and sin and profess faith so they can bring up the child in faith.
- Then comes the profession of faith in God, the Father Almighty; Jesus Christ, His only the Son; the Holy Spirit; and "the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

#### *The Baptism*

- The celebrant priest pours water over his head three times, saying, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," invoking one name of the Holy Trinity in turn before each immersion or pouring of water.

The mother or father usually holds the child; or either godparent may hold the child.

#### **4. Explanatory Rites**

The explanatory rites which follow the baptism have three or four parts.

##### *Anointing With the Chrism*

Before anointing the child with the sacred chrism (consecrated oil), the priest welcomes the child into the holy people of Christ.

- The priest first explains that as Christ was anointed priest, prophet, and king to live in His holy body of people, so he anoints the child and welcomes him to Christ's holy body (the church).
- In silence, he then anoints the child with the oil on the crown of his head, signifying enrollment into the royal priesthood and the company of God.

##### *Clothing With the White Garment*

A small white baptismal bib provided by St. Mary is now put on the child. The white clothing is a baptism symbol representing a new creation. The child is now clothed in Christ and the white garment is an outward sign of the Christian mantle.

##### *Lighted Candle*

- The celebrant priest brings forward the Easter (paschal) candle and says, "Receive the light of Christ."
- A family member or a godparent lights the child's candle from the Easter candle.

The lighting of the child's candle is a symbol of his enlightenment by Christ.

#### **5. Conclusion of the Rite**

##### *The Lord's Prayer*

- The priest reminds all that the child "has been reborn in baptism" and is now a child of God.
- He then invites the congregation, "Let us pray together in the words our Lord has given us."
- The congregation then sings or says The Lord's Prayer: "Our Father who art in heaven... but deliver us from evil."

##### *The Blessing*

Finally, a blessing is given to conclude the baptismal rite. The priest first says a prayer of blessing over the mother (who holds the child), then the father, then everyone else present. He concludes the Sacrament of the Baptism with "May almighty God, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit bless you." The people reply, "Amen."