

Journey OF Faith



In Short:

- Baptism has a foundation in both the Bible and Church history.
- Baptism has both meaning and effects.
- Baptism contains many significant symbols.
- The order of baptism has several steps.

The Sacrament of Baptism

"One Easter I had a chance to meet with a tribe called the Tubolis who live high up in the mountains of Mindanao. For the Easter Vigil, the community of the baptized [Christians] gathered on one side of the river, which is not very wide but very swift and extremely cold. It was dusk, so they had torches; they also had a lot of blankets and a number of jars of oil. Meanwhile, the catechumens, those who were to be baptized, were on the other side of the river. Fr. Rex, their missionary, had planted himself in the middle of the stream, and the rushing water came to just above his waist. Then the community started beckoning to those on the other bank, calling each by name: 'Come on over, Juan; come on over, Maria.'

"The catechumens looked at that stream, and they were a bit fearful because of its swiftness and also because they were already cold. One by one they would plunge into the water with everybody still calling to them. When they came up the other side after being baptized, the community would grab them with blankets, rub oil on them, and pull them into their midst. The whole thing was a powerful scene, and afterward they had a Eucharist, right

there on the banks of the river with the newly baptized."—*Passionist Fr. Donald Senior on his experience in the Philippines.*

The word *baptize* comes from a Greek word meaning to plunge or immerse. These words suggest the use of water—an important symbol in the sacrament of baptism. In Fr. Senior's story, the catechumens quite literally plunged into the river, immersing themselves in the water. They then rose on the opposite bank, where they were greeted by and welcomed into the community of believers. Though the Tubolis live half a world away, their experience of the sacrament of baptism is not completely unlike the experience of our catechumens entering the Church on Holy Saturday night.

In both celebrations, darkness is dispelled by the light of a fire—a powerful symbol of Christ's presence. The baptism itself involves the symbols of water and oil. Both experiences also include the active presence of the community of baptized believers who witness the triumphant moment and welcome the newly baptized into their midst.

- What about baptism makes you excited? Nervous?



What Is the Sacrament of Baptism?

Jesus called his death and resurrection a baptism: "There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!"

Luke 12:50

The *Catechism* tells us more about the sacrament of baptism and helps us understand Jesus' words. The catechumen's "plunging" into the waters of baptism symbolizes his or her burial into Christ's death. As the catechumen rises from the water, he or she is resurrected with Christ as "a new creature" (CCC 1214). While not as dramatic, the symbolism remains the same when water is poured over the heads of the catechumens.

Perhaps St. Gregory of Nazianzus describes the sacrament of baptism most beautifully:

Baptism is God's most beautiful and magnificent gift....We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal, and most precious gift. It is called gift because it is conferred on those who bring nothing of their own....It is our guard and the sign of God's Lordship.

CCC 1216

In his Letter to the Romans, St. Paul says,

We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him. As to his death, he died to sin once and for all; as to his life, he lives for God. Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as [being] dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:9–11

Saint Paul is telling us that we must be imitators of Christ—we must do as Christ did. Rather than a simple ritual, baptism marks the beginning of a deep relationship with the risen Lord.

The baptized person lives "in Christ." As Christians, we have to choose to live good, loving lives. This won't always be easy. We will have our own crosses to bear. We will be tempted to sin. Even so, we must choose to act as Jesus would want us to act. There are no shortcuts to this resurrection with Christ.

While there is no magic, we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit, whose power God promises at the moment of our baptism. A person enters into Christ when they are baptized. That means they also receive the gift of the spirit.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, "Abba, Father!" The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Romans 8:14–17

Baptism: A Private or Community Affair?

For Christians, community has always been an important part of life, maybe even the most important part. From the very beginning, God knew that good relationships with other human beings were essential to human happiness. While things may give us pleasure, they aren't a source of lasting happiness. True human happiness comes only through loving relationships with God and others.

- Think about your relationships with others. When you're at peace with your parents, do you feel more at peace with yourself? When you feel connected to your friends, do you feel greater contentment?



For this reason, Christians have always placed great importance on the community of Christ. Christ is at the center, and the community is built around him. Through baptism, we become members of the body of Christ. We begin to share in the privileges and in the life of this community of believers.

While many Catholics still tend to regard baptism as a private family affair, it is truly a sacrament that involves the entire faith community. When we witness a baptism, our own faith should be strengthened and renewed. Every newly baptized person brings unique beauty and special gifts to the body of Christ.

Baptism is the sacrament of faith. But faith needs the community of believers. It is only within the faith of the church that each of the faithful can believe.

CCC 1253

Because the Catholic Church regards the sacrament of baptism as permanent, it can't be repeated. Baptism causes us to belong to Christ, and that belonging can never be taken away (CCC 1272). Baptism in other Christian faiths is essentially the same as the New Testament practice, which is the basis of Catholic baptism. This makes baptism a bond of unity among all Christians. For this reason, non-Catholic Christians who wish to join the Catholic Church aren't baptized unless there is real doubt as to whether they were ever baptized.

- How might knowing we are united as family in Christ with all Christians in baptism change how you treat others?



What Happens To People Who Aren't Baptized?

In the case of adults and children who are not baptized, Catholics believe that God's mercy works in a way not yet revealed to us. Catholics also believe in "baptism of blood" (suffering death for Christ before baptism) and "baptism of desire." Baptism of desire refers to those who "through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ...yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium], 16).

Catholics believe that children who are not baptized are given to the "mercy of God" and "Jesus' tenderness toward children" (CCC 1261), which gives hope for their eternal happiness in heaven.

What Are the Signs of Baptism?

The sign in baptism is the pouring of water, or the immersion in water, along with the words, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

The waters of baptism remind us that Christ has washed us clean of sin and brought us home to God. In baptism, all our sins are washed away. That is why our baptismal promises include a rejection of our sinful ways and a profession of our personal faith.

The usual minister of the baptism ritual is a priest or deacon, but anyone may baptize if someone is in danger of dying. That person is not baptized again if he or she should recover.

Godparents place a white garment on the newly baptized to show that they have become a new creation and have clothed themselves in Christ. A candle is then lit from the Easter candle and is presented to each of those just baptized. This symbolizes that Christ, the Light of the World, is their light, too. And as Paul says, they must now "live as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8).

If baptism is celebrated separate from confirmation, the newly baptized are then anointed with oil. The oil, called **chrism**, is a perfumed oil consecrated (set apart as sacred) by the bishop. The anointing with sacred chrism is a sign that "[God] has also put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment" (2 Corinthians 1:22). The newly baptized now share in the prophetic, kingly, and priestly power of Christ.

- Can you find examples of God using water, light (fire), or oil as special symbols in the Bible?



Fill in the blanks about the sacrament of baptism.

Water represents the end of _____ and the beginning of _____

In baptism, the name of the oil used is _____

Putting on a white garment symbolizes _____

The lighted baptismal candle represents _____

The usual minister of baptism is a _____ or _____

If an unbaptized person is in danger of dying, _____ may baptize

Our baptism frees us from the power of sin, makes us members of the body of Christ, fills us with the Holy Spirit, and challenges us to live as children of light. How can you bring the light of Christ to the people in your life today?



Journey of Faith for Teens: Catechumenate, C3 (826290)

The process by which adults are initiated into the Catholic faith throughout the United States is now called the OCIA—the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults. “Order” is a clearer translation of the Latin term for the process formerly known as the RCIA—the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. People preparing for baptism and reception into the Church celebrate several rites as part of the order to which those rites belong—an order whose mission is to journey in the faith. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops adopted the name change in 2021, with American dioceses introducing the name thereafter. For more information, please contact your local diocese.

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