

# St Peter's Roman Catholic Church



## BAPTISM

Texts from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

## **A Sacrament of Initiation**

The sacraments of Christian initiation - Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist - lay the foundations of every Christian life. The sharing in the divine nature given to men through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life.

### **What is this Sacrament called?**

Baptism means to plunge or immerse; the plunge into water symbolises burial into Christ's death, becoming a 'new creature.'

It is also called *'the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit'*.

Other names - *enlightenment, gift, grace, anointing, clothing, bath, seal.*

### **What is Baptism?**

- The basis of the whole Christian life.
- The gateway to life in the Spirit.
- The door which gives access to the other sacraments.
- Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God.
- We become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church, and made sharers in her mission.
- Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the Word.

# **Baptism in the Plan of Salvation**

## **Prefigurations of Baptism in the Old Covenant**

In the liturgy of the Easter Vigil the blessing of Baptismal water commemorates events in salvation history prefiguring Baptism:

- At the very dawn of creation your Spirit breathed on the waters making them the wellspring of holiness.
- Noah's Ark: 'The waters of the great flood you made a sign of Baptism that made an end of sin and a new beginning .of goodness'.
- The water of the sea is a symbol of death and can represent the mystery of the cross -Baptism signifies communion with Christ's death.
- The crossing of the Red Sea: 'You freed the children of Abraham from the slavery of Pharaoh, bringing them dry-shod through the waters of the Red Sea, to be an image of the people set free in Baptism'.
- The crossing of the Jordan, by which the People of God received the gift of the Promised Land, is an image of eternal life.

## **Christ's Baptism**

- All the Old Covenant prefigurations find their fulfillment in Christ Jesus. He begins his public life after being Baptised by John the Baptist in the Jordan.
- 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you'.
- At his Baptism Jesus' gesture is a manifestation of his self-emptying. The Spirit who had hovered over the waters of the first creation descended on Christ as a prelude of the new creation, and the Father revealed Jesus as his 'beloved Son'.

- Jesus had already spoken of his Passion as a 'Baptism'. The blood and water that flowed from the pierced side of the crucified Christ are types of Baptism and the Eucharist, the sacraments of new life.

### **Baptism in the Church**

- At Pentecost: 'Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift: of the Holy Spirit'.
- Baptism is seen as being connected with Faith: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household'. Then the jailer 'was baptised at once, with his family'.
- According to St Paul the believer enters through Baptism into communion with Christ's death, is buried with him, and rises with him.
- The Baptised have 'put on Christ'. Through the Holy Spirit, Baptism is a bath that purifies, justifies and sanctifies.

## The Celebration of Baptism

The meaning and grace of the Sacrament are clearly seen in the rites of Baptism

- **The Sign of the Cross** signifies the grace of the redemption Christ won for us by his cross.
- **The Proclamation of the Word of God** elicits the response of faith since Baptism is the 'sacrament of faith'.
- One or more **exorcisms** is pronounced over the candidate who is anointed with the Oil of Catechumens signifying the liberation from sin and from its instigator the devil which is achieved through Baptism.
- Thus prepared, he or she is able to **confess the faith of the Church** to which he will be entrusted by Baptism.
- The **Baptismal Water** is consecrated - asking God that through his Son the power of the Holy Spirit may be sent upon the water.
- The **Essential Rite** - Baptism signifies and actually brings about death to sin and entry into the life of the Most Holy Trinity through the configuration to the Paschal mystery of Christ. The triple infusion is accompanied by the Priest's words: 'I baptise you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'.
- The **Anointing with Sacred Chrism** - the newly Baptised is anointed by the Holy Spirit, incorporated into Christ who is anointed Priest, Prophet and King. It also announces a second anointing later conferred by the bishop in Confirmation.
- The **White Garment** symbolizes the person has 'put on' Christ'.
- The **Candle** lit from the Easter Candle signifies that Christ has enlightened the Baptised.
- **First Holy Communion** - Having become a child of God clothed with the wedding garment, the neophyte

is admitted to the 'marriage supper of the Lamb' and receives the food of life, the Body and Blood of Christ. For the newly baptised child, the praying of the *Our Father* at the altar signifies the orientation of Baptism to the Eucharist.

## **Who Can Receive Baptism?**

**The Baptism of Adults** - The catechumenate occupies an important place. This initiation into Christian faith and life should dispose the catechumen to receive the gift of God in Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist.

**The Baptism of Infants** - Born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also have a need of the new birth in Baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God, to which all men are called. The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth. The practice of Infant Baptism is an immemorial tradition of the Church.

**Faith and Baptism** -The catechumen or Godparent is asked: 'What do you ask of God's Church?' the response is 'Faith'. Faith must grow after Baptism. Each year the Church celebrates the renewal of baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil. Baptism is the source of that new life in Christ from which the entire Christian life springs forth.

## **Who can Baptise?**

The ordinary ministers of Baptism are the Bishop and Priest and also the Deacon. In case of necessity, any person, even someone not baptised, can baptise if he has the required intention.

## The Necessity of Baptism

The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation. *God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.*

**Baptism of Blood** - Those who suffer death for the sake of the faith without having received Baptism are baptised by their death for and with Christ.

**Baptism of Desire** - Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and docs the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have *desired Baptism explicitly*, if they had known its necessity.

**Children who have died without Baptism** - The Church entrusts them to the mercy of God. 'Let the little children come to me', allows us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism. All the more urgent is the Church's call not to prevent little children coming to Christ through the gift of holy Baptism.

## The Grace of Baptism

### **For the forgiveness of sins - 'A new creature'**

Immersion in water symbolises not only death and purification, but also regeneration and renewal. Thus the two principal effects are *purification from sin* and *new birth in the Holy Spirit*.

By Baptism *all sins are forgiven*, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin. Yet, temporal consequences of sin remain such as *concupiscence* or inclination to sin. Baptism makes the

neophyte a 'new creature', 'an adopted Son of God', 'a partaker of the divine nature', member of Christ and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit.

The Most Holy Trinity gives the baptised sanctifying grace, the grace of justification.

The whole organism of the Christian's supernatural life has its roots in Baptism - the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the moral virtues.

### **Incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ**

Baptism makes us members of the Body of Christ and incorporates us *into the Church*. The Baptised are 'built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood'. By Baptism they share in the priesthood of Christ, in his prophetic and holy mission. *Baptism gives a share in the common priesthood of all believers.*

The baptised belongs not to himself but to Him who died and rose for us. There is a duty to obey the Church's leaders. The baptised also enjoys rights within the Church - to receive the remaining six Sacraments, the Word of God and to be nourished by other spiritual helps. Baptism constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who are reborn.

### **An Indelible Spiritual Mark**

The person baptised is configured to Christ. Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible mark (*character*) of his belonging to Christ. Given once for all, Baptism cannot be repeated.

This sacramental character consecrates them for Christian religious worship and sharing in the holy liturgy.

The Holy Spirit has marked us with the '*seal of the Lord*' for the day of redemption. Baptism is indeed the seal of eternal life.



## **In Brief**

Baptism is birth into the new life in Christ. In accordance with the Lord's will, it is necessary for salvation, as is the Church herself, which we enter by Baptism.

The fruit of Baptism, or baptismal grace, is a rich reality that includes forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins, birth into the new life by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. By this very fact the person baptised is incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ and a sharer in the priesthood of Christ.