

Baptism

The First Sacrament of Christian Initiation

Baptism is the first of the three Sacraments of Christian Initiation, followed by Confirmation and the Eucharist. Through Baptism we are freed from sin, become adopted sons and daughters of God, are united with Jesus Christ, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and become members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

As the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches:

"Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments." (CCC 1213)

What Does Baptism Do?

Through Baptism:

- We are cleansed of Original Sin and all personal sins.
- We become children of God.
- We receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- We become members of Christ's Body, the Church.
- We are called to share in Christ's mission of proclaiming the Gospel.
- We receive an indelible spiritual mark (or "seal") that can never be erased.

Because Baptism leaves this permanent spiritual mark, it can only be received once.

Baptism and New Life

Water is the central symbol of Baptism. It is both a sign of cleansing and of new life.

In Baptism we are united with Jesus in His death and resurrection. St. Paul writes:

"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead... we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:4)

The Bible also connects Baptism with other saving events:

- Noah and the flood, where water became the means of salvation.
- The crossing of the Red Sea, where God freed Israel from slavery.
- Jesus' own Baptism in the Jordan River.

These events help us understand Baptism as God's gift of freedom, cleansing, and new life.

How Is Baptism Celebrated?

The Catholic Church baptizes using natural water and the Trinitarian formula given by Jesus:

"I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Water may be applied by:

- Immersion, where the person is submerged in water.
- Pouring, where water is poured over the head.

Both forms are fully valid and express dying and rising with Christ.

Why Does the Church Baptize Infants?

Catholics baptize infants because Baptism is God's free gift of grace, not something that must be earned. Just as parents provide food, shelter, and love for their children, they also desire to give them the gift of divine life as early as possible.

Parents and godparents promise to raise the child in the Catholic faith until the child is able to profess that faith personally.

Valid Baptism

For a Baptism to be valid, three essential elements are required:

1. Natural water must be used.
2. The minister must say:

"I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

3. The minister must intend to do what the Church does when she baptizes.

Because of these requirements, the Catholic Church recognizes the Baptisms of many Christian communities whose baptisms are performed with water and the Trinitarian formula. In some cases where there is uncertainty, a conditional Baptism may be celebrated.

Living Our Baptism

Baptism is not simply a ceremony performed once in our lives. It marks the beginning of a lifelong journey of discipleship. Every baptized Christian is called to:

- Grow in faith through prayer and the sacraments.
- Live as a witness to Christ.
- Serve others with love.
- Share the Good News of the Gospel.
- Participate fully in the life and mission of the Church.

Every time we bless ourselves with holy water upon entering a church, we are reminded of our Baptism and our call to live each day as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.