

## **BAPTISM SOURCE OF NEW LIFE: A BRIEF THEOLOGY**

On the day we call Ascension Thursday, Jesus gathered his disciples on a Mountain in Galilee just outside of Jerusalem and commissioned them to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing 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.” (Matt. 28:19-20)

And from that first Pentecost, the Church has called all people to “Repent, and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

The Sacrament of Baptism invites us on a journey of faith as a disciple of Jesus, the Christ. It calls us to a way of life in the spirit. It is the beginning of our initiation into the Christian mystery. Baptism is a sacrament of initiation, the Source of that New Life in Christ from which the entire Christian life springs forth.

In the waters of Baptism we are freed from the power of darkness and are empowered by the Light of Christ. In the waters of Baptism, we die to the ways of sin, we are buried and we rise again to new life as children of God.

### **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?**

For us, baptism is the sign of our unity with Christ’s community, and a witness to our desire to be part of the discipleship of Christ. One’s baptismal commitment means participating in the Paschal Mystery, the dying and rising of Jesus. Through Baptism we become a new creation, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, sharing in God’s own life. Above all, Baptism is a sacrament of faith and commitment by which we respond to the gospel of Jesus, the Christ and enter into a holy covenant with God in Jesus through His Church. We are formed into God’s people and are incorporated into the Body of Christ.

Adults and children of catechetical age make this choice for themselves; parents make the choice for infants.

### **CHOOSING BAPTISM FOR MY CHILD**

When considering Baptism for your child, you need to reflect on what it is you are asking of God’s Church, and you also need to reflect on your own Baptism.

- What has it meant in your own life to be a member of the Body of Christ?
- How do you live out your Baptismal commitment today in love and service to God and neighbor?
- Are you ready to be a Christian parent, training your child in the practice of faith, teaching them to keep God’s commandments?

Sometimes parents ask to have their child baptized out of fear – fear of God, fear of what grandparents will say, fear of what family and friends will think.

Sometime parents ask to have their child baptized because of superstition – believing that if their child is not baptized something bad will happen to their baby, or God will punish them for not doing so.

Sometimes parents ask to have their child baptized because their cultural heritage tells them this is what you do – babies are always baptized and then you have a party in their honor.

When motivated by fear or superstition or cultural heritage, baptizing our child could be a hypocritical action.

Baptism does not change God. God will love our child; God will love us whether we celebrate Baptism or not. But Baptism, thoughtfully and reflectively celebrated, changes us and the one we bring for Baptism.

So when we choose Baptism for our child it should be because we understand what Baptism is about and we fully intend to live the Christian life in such a way that our child will grow in justice and love and come to know the Lord Jesus.

When bringing your child to the Church for Baptism, your Parish Community will want to know that you are a faith-filled member:

- sharing regularly in worship with them
- accepting the teaching of the Creed we profess to believe
- committed to a way of life influenced by the Lord Jesus, a way of life that values prayer and service to others.

### **CHOOSING GODPARENTS**

Godparents are companions for our Journey of Faith from the waters of our Parish Baptismal font to the fullness of life in Christ Jesus.

In choosing Godparents for your child, you need to consider fully initiated members of the Catholic Church who are at least 16 years of age. A fully initiated person is someone who has received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist and who continues to witness to that faith in the great and small ways of everyday living. You want someone who knows that being a Catholic has to do with prayer, with justice toward the poor, with kindness for friends and strangers and being an active member of a faith community. Parents may not serve in this role.

Although, traditionally, parents have chosen a godmother and a godfather for their child, only one godparent is required for baptism. It is also possible to invite a person baptized in another Christian tradition to be a witness at the child’s baptism, along with the Catholic godparent.

The primary role of the godparents is to witness to the faith of God alive in their hearts and to be willing to share that faith in a supportive way with their godchild as well as to support the faith-life of the parents.

Godparents represent “both the local Church Community and the whole society of saints and believers” in welcoming this newest member to the Body of Christ and pledging the support and the prayer of all of us in living a life worthy of the dignity of the children of God.

#### **PLANNING THE CELEBRATION**

Precisely because Baptism is a welcome into the Christian Community, the Body of Christ, it is to be a communal affair, an experience that belongs within the gathered local community of faith. “The celebration of Baptism, like the preparation for the sacrament, should take place in the parish of the family of the child to be Baptized. Only extraordinary circumstances would allow the Baptism to take place outside a family’s own parish.” (Sacramental Guideline)

The official instructions that accompany the revised Rite of Baptism recommend that Baptism be celebrated during the Easter Vigil or on Sunday, so as to bring out the Paschal character of Baptism, the dying and rising of Jesus. The instruction further encourages that on Sunday, Baptisms be celebrated during Mass, so the entire community may be present to welcome its newest members and more wholeheartedly accept responsibility for the new life presented to it.

Baptism may be performed using either the Rite of Immersion or the Rite of Infusion (pouring).

Immersion is the traditional method of baptizing. It was the only rite used for baptizing until the fourteenth century.

The Rite of Infusion, or pouring, became popular when the Church of the Middle Ages received Baptism more as a sacrament for purification and the washing away of sin than as a Sacrament of Initiation and new life.

The preferred method in the Roman Catholic Church is immersion. Truly the Rite of Immersion is a fuller, more appropriate sign of Baptism as a participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ.

We come to the waters to die to sin and to rise to new life.

Baptism is a beginning. It can happen only once in a lifetime. But it can be renewed over and over again in a person’s life. The Baptism of your child is an opportunity to renew your Baptism commitment. It is an occasion to celebrate the amazing gift of life that our God shares with us.

A complete copy of the *Sacramental Guidelines of the Diocese of Rochester* is available in each parish. If you would like to read them, please call your pastor or catechetical leader.

# **A GUIDE FOR PARENTS**

# **BAPTISM PREPARATION**

In The  
Diocese of Rochester



*The Department of  
Evangelization and Catechesis*