

# The Ritual of Baptism



**Gathered Assembly:** The celebration of this sacrament in the presence of a welcoming assembly expresses the communal nature of baptism. The relatives, neighbours, and friends and, indeed, the entire parish community represents Christ's own welcoming. This is why the preferred setting for the celebration of Baptism is during the Sunday celebration of Eucharist.

- ❖ **Godparents:** Godparents embody the caring love of the Christian community - all the saints and believers. They testify to our need for love and support in living lives of faithfulness. During the baptismal ceremony, godparents of adults witness to the serious intention of the person being baptized. Godparents of children speak on their behalf. In both cases godparents commit to being faith companions and spiritual guides to the one being baptized.
- ❖ **Scrutiny:** During the ritual of baptism, questions are asked of the person being baptized (if they are over the age of seven) or their godparents (if they are infants) as well as of their parents. The catechumens, godparents and parents make manifest and strengthen their desires and commitments by expressing them before the gathered church.
- ❖ **Sign of the Cross:** People are welcomed under the sign of the cross, the identifying symbol of who we are as church.
- ❖ **Celebration of the Word:** We proclaim the Word of God, by which the community is guided and lives.
- ❖ **Prayer of Exorcism and the Anointing before Baptism:** The presider prays a prayer over the person being baptised asking that God drive away all the evil spirits which plague the human community and cause us to turn away from God.
- ❖ **Baptismal Font:** The font is located either near the door of the church (reminding us that baptism is entrance into the Church) or near the sanctuary (reminding us that the eucharistic celebration completes the initiation begun at baptism). Many newer churches have large baptismal fonts in which people can be baptized by immersion. This is a fuller symbol of our "immersion" in the waters of new life.
- ❖ **Water:** In water we know life, death, rebirth, cleansing, refreshment, and warmth. All of this is evoked in us as we pour water over the head of the person being baptised - three times, in the name of the blessed Trinity.

- ❖ **Blessing of Water:** When the water for baptism is blessed at Easter, the paschal candle is plunged into the font demonstrating that the person about to enter these waters is being baptized into the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Water is scattered to the four corners of the earth to indicate that its grace is for all peoples everywhere. Holy oils are poured into it to make plain that all who pass through the waters of baptism are re-created in the likeness of the Lord's Anointed One. At all baptisms, the prayer of blessing over the water is prayed. In this prayer, we hear of the sacred sign that water has been in our lives as a people - from the dawn of creation through the Exodus to Jesus own baptism and command to his disciples to baptize all nations.
- ❖ **Renunciation of Evil and Profession of Faith:** Parents and godparents of a child are called upon to reject all that is evil "so as to live in the freedom of God's children" and to profess their faith as embodied in the Creed. When people are baptised as adults, they do this for themselves and the whole community joins with them in renewing their own commitment.
- ❖ **Anointing with Chrism:** Traditionally sovereigns, priests and those sent on a special mission were anointed. The newly baptized person is likewise anointed with oil indicating that she or he belongs to a "priestly people, a royal nation, a people set apart."
- ❖ **White Garment:** The white garment is a sign of being clothed in the newness of Christ. As you can imagine, in the early church, a world without automatic washing machines, white was a startling sign of newness and purity. Newly baptised people in the early church, and in many churches again today, shed their old clothing and donned white garments. These were then worn until the feast of Pentecost as a sign of the new Christian's "neophyte" status.
- ❖ **Candle:** For Christians, lit candles symbolize the light of Christ as well as our call to bring that light to the world around us. The candle given to the newly baptised is lit from the Pascal (Easter) candle to link the celebration with that of Easter. This candle might be made and decorated by the family or godparents, or may be given to the candidate by the parish.
- ❖ **Ephphetha:** This Greek word means "be opened". The presider touches the ears and mouth of the one baptized and prays that Jesus, who made the deaf hear and the dumb speak, will soon let her or him understand God's Word and proclaim her or his faith.
- ❖ **The Blessing:** The mother, father and the entire assembly is blessed.
- ❖ **Lent & The Easter Vigil:** Each year during lent, catechumens engage in their final preparation for baptism at the Easter Vigil. Alongside them, each and every Catholic, is called to reflect on their own baptismal commitment and renew it. The Easter Vigil is the privileged place for baptism because it visibly connects the dying to sin and rising to new life of the Christian person with the dying and rising of Jesus.