

## Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I.A.)

**What we are doing now.** Our catechumen and our candidates have entered the second Period of the Catechumenate. The Catechumenate is an extended period during which the participants are given suitable pastoral formation and guidance, aimed at training them in the Christian life. It is during this time that the newly converted set out on a spiritual journey, eager to take part in celebrations of the Word of God and to receive blessings and other sacramentals.

Father George was our catechist last week and he introduced our candidates to the sacraments and specifically to Baptism. The sacraments will continue to be discussed over the next six weeks.

### Catechism for All of Us...

The whole liturgical life of the Church revolves around the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacraments. There are seven sacraments in the Church: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist are the sacraments of initiation; Penance and Anointing of the Sick are the sacraments of spiritual and physical healing; Holy Orders and Matrimony are sacraments at the service of the Church. Sacraments are “powers that comes forth” from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are the actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church. They are “the masterworks of God” in the new and everlasting covenant. (CCC 1113, 1116)

Grace is a free and unmerited gift from God; it is the inspiration needed to do his will. At baptism the soul is imprinted perfectly with God’s grace. People who cooperate with these graces are different; it is visible in the way they live, act and speak. Little children *have to be taught how to cooperate* with God’s grace, but they are very receptive to the mystery of our faith. A sacrament is the outward sign that Christ instituted to give grace. But in Baptism we were promised even more. *And Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized 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.” (Acts 2:38)*

Baptism is the basis of the whole of Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit, and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. (CCC 1213) This sacrament is also called “the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit,” for it signifies and actually brings about the birth of water and the Spirit without which no one “can enter the kingdom of God.” (CCC 1215) Baptism is the sanctifying event that leaves an indelible spiritual imprint (character) on the soul which should be visible in the way we live. Father George compared this indelible, invisible mark on our soul, which identifies us as belonging to the Lord, to the branding of cattle with the hot iron signifying the owner of the cattle no matter where it is found. This character, too, remains whether we are faithful or unfaithful; whether we deny Him or not.

Sacraments consist of a specific form (rite) and specific matter (such as water or oil). **The rite** is based on this Gospel of Matthew. *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and 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; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” (Mt 28:18-20)* The rite also includes prayers, especially the Litany of the Saints, and material symbols of Baptism’s effects including anointing with blessed Chrism Oil, a candle lit from the Easter Candle, and a white garment (alb). Water (immersion or poured/infusion or sprinkled/aspersion) is **the matter** of Baptism, a washing unto new life. We die with our Lord in Baptism and are born into the new, spiritual life of Christ, and are clothed with him. *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:3-4)*

Baptism does not take away free will. The first effect of Baptism is the forgiveness of original and all personal/actual sin and the soul is filled with sanctifying grace. Subsequent sin cannot erase the effects of Baptism from one's soul. The theological virtues of faith, hope and love are infused into the soul by God at Baptism. The second effect of Baptism is our rebirth as adopted children of God. Once made a child of God, one is a child of God for all eternity. For this reason, Baptism is never repeated.

Because of so many real, objective and spiritual benefits conferred on one through Baptism, the Catholic Church has baptized infants from the beginning. The New Testament affirms that entire households were baptized, parents and children. The effects of this sacrament are not dependant on the faith or understanding of the child being baptized, Scripture tells us it is for the forgiveness of sins. Catechumens who die before they are baptized can be saved based on the presumption of their desire to receive the sacrament, to repent of their sins, and to live a life of charity. This is *baptism of desire*.

The sacraments are necessary for our salvation- they serve the plan of the Father to transform us and to be united forever in the divine life. (see Jn 3:5 and Jn 6:53-58)

**Read it for yourself.** CCC: 537, 977-978, 1113-1130, 1127-1128, 1213-1274

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