



## **What is Baptism?**

The word comes from a Greek word (“baptisma”) that means “dipping in water” or “washing.” Baptism unites us with Christ and makes us children of God.

Baptism is the first of the three Sacraments of Initiation. In the waters of Baptism, we become members of the Body of Christ--God's People; we are configured to Jesus Christ the High Priest and share in his prophetic, kingly, and priestly mission; original sin is remitted.

*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. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him." (Acts 2:37-38)*

Baptism:

- Bestows God’s grace on us
- Names us a child of God
- Adopts us into a new family
- Calls us into newness of life
- Provides assurance that a saving relationship with God has begun through the work of the Holy Spirit
- Gives us the promise of eternal life in God’s kingdom

Jesus said *“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 and teach them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”* (Matthew 28:19-20a)

## **Why does the Church baptize infants?**

It has always been the practice of the Church to baptize infants. From the earliest days, when an adult was baptized so was everyone else in that person's household (see Acts 10). The Catholic Church recognizes that infants cannot make their own profession of faith, so infants are baptized on the faith of the Church and there must "be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion; if such a hope is altogether lacking, the Baptism is to be put off" (Canon 868 1.1)

### **But infants cannot make an act of faith in God or Jesus Christ, can they?**

That is true, and the Church recognizes that, so infants are baptized on the faith of the parents. This means there must "be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion; if such a hope is altogether lacking, the baptism is to be put off" (Canon 868 1.1). In other words, if there is little or no faith on the part of the parents, little or no faith will be passed on to the child. The Church earnestly desires all who are baptized to participate in the weekly liturgical and pastoral life of the community.

### **Who is considered for infant baptism?**

The Church considers anyone who has not yet completed their seventh year to be an infant. Therefore, the parents of children under the age of seven may request baptism and attend the parish's infant baptism preparation session. For those children who are over seven years of age the Church requires that they make a profession of faith. Therefore it is necessary that they themselves be prepared for the Sacraments of Initiation.

## **What is the role of parents?**

### **Primary responsibilities of parents are to:**

- Provide for your child's baptism
- Teach your child to pray, and pray with your child
- Place the scriptures into your child's hands, and read them with your child
- Teach and live out the Lord's Prayers, the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the teachings of Jesus in the Bible
- Nurture your child's spiritual growth and encourage active participation in worship, faith education, and service in Jesus' name"

"Most certainly fathers and mothers are apostles, bishop, and priest to their children, for it is they who make them acquainted with the gospel.

## **What is the role of baptism sponsor or godparent?**

### **What is a sponsor or godparent?**

A godparent is a practicing Christian who serves in partnership with the parents to nurture the child in Christian faith. A godparent does not need to be a relative.

### **What is the role of the godparents?**

The role of the sponsor or Godparent is, "together with the parents, to present an infant at Baptism, and help the baptized to lead a Christian life in harmony with Baptism, and to fulfill faithfully the obligations connected with it." (Canon 872) In the beginning of the Rite of Baptism of Children, the Godparents are asked if they are willing to help the parents of the one baptized in their duties as Christian parents. Thus, the function of the Godparents is not merely ceremonial or social but to assist the parents in raising their child in the practice of the faith.

## **What does a godparent do?**

They strive:

- To pray for the child regularly
- To be a model of love, care, and Christ-centered faith for the child
- To encourage and assist the child in their relationship with Jesus
- To be a regular presence in the life of the child
- To be at the baptism (if possible)
- To remember the child on baptism anniversaries and other holidays

## **What does it mean to lead a "life in harmony with the faith and role to be undertaken?"**

In addition to being a fully initiated Catholic (i.e., having received the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist) the godparent must also be a person of faith--one who regularly attends Sunday Mass, has been married according to the norms of the Catholic Church (if married), and strives to deepen his or her relationship with God through Jesus. A good question to ask is: "Does this person take care of their own faith... if not is he/she likely to help take care of my child's?"

## **Godparents for a Catholic Baptism**

### **What are the requirements to be a godparent?**

A godparent should have received the Sacrament of Confirmation, be a Catholic Christian who is at least 16 years of age, and who faithfully practices and believes in the Catholic faith as a participating member of a parish community. (Canon Law 874,1)

### **How many godparents are allowed?**

Church law only requires you to have one godparent; however, it has been tradition to have two. (Canon Law 873)

### **Can the same godparents have responsibility for more than one child in the same family?**

Yes, as long as they take seriously their responsibility and intention to help the children grow in faith.

### **What gender should the godparent be?**

If you chose only one godparent, you are free to choose a male or a female. However, if you wish to have two godparents, there must be one male and one female. (Canon Law 873)

### **Can a non-Catholic serve as godparent?**

A baptized, non-Catholic may serve as an "official witness" to the baptism, only if there is a proper Catholic godparent who fully meets all requirements of a godparent. The non-Catholic who is selected as a witness should be an active and participating member of their church community. During the baptism, a non-Catholic witness may perform all the parts of the ceremony that a godparent does. His or her name will be entered into the Sacrament record book as an "official witness", together with the name of the godparent. (Canon Law 874,2)

**What is the difference between a godparent and a witness?**

Canon Law describes a witness as “A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community.” A godparent is a confirmed, practicing Catholic in good standing with the Church.

**Can someone serve as godparent by proxy (stand-in) if the godparent is unable to participate in the baptism ceremony?**

If a godparent cannot attend the baptism ceremony, a proxy can stand in the place of the missing godparent. The name of that person will be entered as “proxy” in the sacramental book, along with the name of the missing godparent.

**Baptism Preparation Class for Parents, Godparents and Sponsors****Why do the parents and godparents have to attend a preparation class and Faith Formation?**

Before the celebration of baptism, the Church expects parents and godparents (sponsors) to be formed in the meaning of the sacrament as well as its responsibilities (Canon 851).

**Does the child have to have a saint's name?**

As a minimum, the Church requires that no name "foreign to a Christian mentality" be given to the child (Canon 855). Consider, however, choosing a name for the child from the rich tradition of models of the Christian life. In some cultures, the one is named after the saint whose feast day the child is born on or around. Then, as the child grows up, encourage him or her to learn about the patron, perhaps promoting a devotion to the child's namesake.

**Is there a charge for the baptism?**

The Church never charges for the celebration of a Sacrament. Rather, Christians give out of gratitude for what they have received from God. A donation to the parish may be made after the celebration of the baptism.