

THE RITE OF
INFANT BAPTISM
WITH
SOME COMMENTS

General Comments

The old rite that was used for the baptism of babies was a reduction and adaptation of the ceremonies originally used for adults. For example, the dialogue directed towards adults was hardly altered and often directed towards the child.

Canon Law: Though Baptism may be celebrated on any day, it is recommended that normally it be celebrated on a Sunday or, if possible, on the vigil of Easter. Canon No.856. *This recommendation highlights the relationship between Baptism and the Paschal Mystery - the saving work of Jesus in his Death and Resurrection. Saint Paul teaches 'you were buried with him in Baptism, in which you were also raised with him' (Colossians 2:12). The day of Resurrection, Sunday, in which Jesus' completed his work is the most appropriate day for Baptism.*

Questions are addressed to parents and godparents; unlike the old rite, in which the priest 'questioned' the child. Throughout the rite the role of the parents is placed at the centre of the child's spiritual and moral development - another of the important changes from the old ceremony. Sacraments operate within the context of faith. The Church directs its attention upon the parents asking that they recognize the importance of providing an environment in which faith may grow. It is the parents who have the primary task of raising their child in the ways of faith. The role of godparents is to assist in this but it is always secondary.

Canon Law: One Sponsor, male or female, is sufficient; but there may be two, one of each sex. Canon No.873
To be admitted to undertake the office of sponsor, a person must:

1. Be appointed by the candidate... or by the parents...
2. be not less than sixteen years of age... or unless parish priest or minister considers there is a just reason for an exception to be made
3. be a catholic who has been confirmed and has received the blessed Eucharist and who lives a life of faith which befits the role...
4. not labour under a canonical penalty...
5. not be the father or mother of the person to be baptised

A baptised person who belongs to a non-catholic ecclesial community may be admitted only in company with a catholic sponsor, and then simply as a witness to the baptism.

In the old rite the godparents played a more important role than the parents. This was because the ceremony had grown out of the adult baptismal rite.

Non-catholic 'godparents' are usually referred to as 'christian witnesses'. In practice most people seem to regard them as indistinguishable from godparents.

Baptism and our entry into the Church is remembered every time we bless ourselves at the holy water stoups.

Singing

The opportunity to sing should not be automatically dismissed as impractical. If there is a considerable congregation it is often possible to sustain unaccompanied singing quite easily. The choice of hymns can be left to the family (some guidance may be appreciated); they may even know someone who is prepared to start off the singing!

Reception of the Child

The people may sing a psalm or hymn suitable for the occasion. Meanwhile the celebrating priest or deacon goes to the entrance of the church or to that part of the church where the parents and godparents are waiting...

The Door

The instruction that the Reception of the Child should take place at the door of the church is a simple and effective way of expressing the idea that Baptism is the way into the Church and the Door to life in Christ. It can be pointed out that Christ himself, the Door who opens the way to everlasting life, is present in this ceremony - 'I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.' (John 10:9)

Canon Law: Parents, sponsors and parish priests are to take care that a name is not given which is foreign to Christian sentiment. Canon No.855.

The giving of a name is a significant choice made by parents at the beginning of their child's life. It is an affirmation that this person has value and a place within family and community. Certain names can have significance within a family or actually mean something. On a wider scale, names express a setting in which we live as part of a community. The rite involves naming as we come into the family of the Church; we are named in Christ as his adopted sister/brother as we become sharers in the divine life. At one time Canon Law required that at least one of the given names was that of a saint. This requirement has been modified to a prohibition against names contrary to Christian sentiment.

Signing of candidates with the cross for Baptism goes back to at least the fourth century. Saint Augustine points out that it is a sign that they are not ashamed of the Lord's cross. It also a reminder of the passage in the prophet Ezekiel 9:4 in which those marked with a sign (of a cross) were spared from death.

Making the sign of the cross: Signing the cross on oneself with a thumb is the most ancient way of performing this gesture - it was being done in the third century. The conventional method that we follow developed later. The connection between the cross,

Celebrant: What name do you give your child?

Parents: N.

Celebrant: **What do ask of God's Church for N.?**

Parents: **Baptism.**

The celebrant may choose other words for this dialogue. In the second response the parents may use other words, e.g. 'faith', 'the grace of Christ', 'eternal life'.

Celebrant: You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him/her in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him/her up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbour. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?

Parents: We do.

Celebrant: Are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents?

Godparents: We are.

Celebrant: N., the Christian community welcomes you with great joy. In its name I claim you for Christ our Saviour by the sign of his cross. I now trace the cross on your forehead, and invite these others to do the same.

He signs the child on the forehead, in silence. Then he invites the parents and, if it seems appropriate, the godparents to do the same. The celebrant invites the parents and godparents and the others to take part in the Liturgy of the Word. If circumstances permit, there

is a procession to the place where this will be celebrated, during which a song may be sung.

explanation of this prayer can draw attention to the idea that the Church is more than those who gather here on earth. It includes those who have gone before us and who now share everlasting rest. In praying the Litany we are also asking for the prayers of those people we have known who are now dead.

It might be an idea to help the parents to think of which names to add to the litany; they could also ask a member of the family to lead it.

Liturgy of the Word

In the old form of the ceremony there were no readings from the Word of God. One of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council was to insist upon the inclusion of the Scriptures in every Sacrament. This reminds us that the Sacraments exist in the setting of faith which is fed by the God's Word, nurtured by sound teaching. Sacraments should not be seen as something that are just 'done' to us. It is an opportunity to deepen our faith, a moment of grace in which God opens our hearts to himself and helps us grow in understanding.

There is an opportunity here to allow parents and family to pick the scripture passages and to read them at the ceremony (the Gospel reading would normally be read by the priest or deacon). By letting them choose we help them to reflect upon the meaning of Baptism. If possible, we might discuss with the parents their reasoning behind their selection.

It is advisable to have available in advance a copy of the readings to allow the reader(s) to practise.

A homily may follow in which the priest speaks about the meaning of the sacrament - again, something that was not usually part of the old rite.

Intercessions The intercessions or bidding prayers (introduced at the revision of the rite) provide an opportunity for the people to pray in a more informal way for the child and his/her family. It can involve a member of the family and/or congregation and it is permissible to add to those provided or substitute more appropriate ones depending upon the circumstances (e.g. if a close relative is sick or has died).

The intercessions draw out the fact that all who are present are not just bystanders or even witnesses. Each of us has a responsibility to provide part of the right background in which the child will grow in faith.

It would be wise to have a copy of the intercessions available in advance so that the reader may practise.

Litany Other names can be added to the Litany such as the patron saints of the child, parents, godparents. An

Liturgy of the Word

The celebrant invites the parents, godparents and the others to take part in the liturgy of the word. If circumstances permit there is a procession to the place where this will be celebrated, during which a song is sung.

One or even two of the following gospel passages are read, during which all may sit if convenient.

John 3:16	The meeting with Nicodemus.
Matthew 28:18-30	The apostles are sent to preach the gospel and to baptise.
Mark 1:9-11	The baptism of Jesus.
Mark 10:13-16	'Let the little children come to me'

Texts for Baptism in the Lectionary for Mass, Volume III, pp 59-73 may be chosen, or other scripture passages that meet the wishes or needs of the parents. Between the readings, responsorial psalms or verses may be sung.

Homily

Bidding prayers

Other forms of these may be chosen added to or omitted taking into consideration the special circumstances of the family. An example is given here.

Priest: My brothers and sisters,
let us ask our Lord Jesus Christ
to look lovingly on this child who is to be baptised,
on his (her) parents and godparents
and on all the baptised.

Reader:By the mystery of your death and resurrection,
bathe this child in light
give him (her) the new life of baptism
and welcome him (her) into your holy Church.
Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Etc.

Litany of the Saints

The celebrant next invites all present to invoke the saints.

Reader	All
Holy Mary, Mother of God	pray for us.
Saint John the Baptist	pray for us.
Saint Joseph	pray for us.

Saint Peter and Saint Paul
Saint

pray for us.
pray for us.

The names of the other saints may be added, especially the patrons of the child to be baptised and of the church and the locality.

At the end of the list..

All holy men and women

pray for us.

Exorcism *In the old form of the ceremony there were seven prayers of exorcism, said one after another before baptism. These were reduced for children to two.*

They originated in separate ceremonies in which adults, preparing for baptism, would give up their old allegiances and beliefs. Christians of the ancient world were very conscious of the idea of being in the power of spirits and evil. It is perhaps understandable when we remember that they lived in a society of paganism and superstition which often persecuted Christians. It seemed only too clear that the world was in the power of darkness.

In our more secular world this awareness has changed and we see that to be possessed in some way is not something that just happens by accident. The Church still recognises that some adults who have given themselves to superstitious worship, practices and belief may need special prayer for God's help to be released from their old life.

A person may deliberately commit great evil but this cannot apply to a child. At the time of the revision of the ceremony it was clear that these prayers needed to be changed for the times when infants are baptised. Exorcism in this new rite is not to be seen as being about driving out demons but more to do with asking for help and protection in the struggle against evil that takes place in every human life.

If it is felt that it is necessary to explain these prayers one might start with the age old question of who does the child take after. Often friends and relatives will 'see' parents and grandparents in the appearance and mannerisms of the young. For the Christian we can say that the child most resembles God - we are made in the image of God. At the same time it is important to remember that each of us is individual - we are ourselves and not copies of others. Our individuality is a mixture of strength and weakness. As a child begins the journey through life we pray that God will help him/her with all that is needed to grow in love and faith and to resist the things that might lead a person astray. The prayers speak of this problem that every human faces - the struggle against temptation. These prayers can provide an opportunity to reflect upon what it is to be human. Are we simply the result of our background and upbringing or is there something else in our character that is part of our individuality.

We should note that the word 'sin' is in the singular. We do not say that the child must be freed from individual sins - it has not committed any, But we do pray to be released from the condition in which we find ourselves - weakness and a tendency to sin.

The prayers speak about the world as it really is. To pretend that everything in the world works for good is naïve. It is just as

wrong to say that there is no wickedness in the world as it is to claim that nothing good is found in human life. These prayers ask for change from darkness to light. We admit that this is brought about by the power of Jesus who came to set us free.

It may not be necessary to mention the idea that there is a prayer of exorcism in the ceremony of Baptism. But if the subject arises it is important to stress that this has nothing to do with the kind of things luridly portrayed on film or television. Rather it is something to do with ordinary life.

Prayer of Exorcism

For this prayer there is a choice.

Alternative A

Almighty and ever-living God,
you sent your only Son into the world
to cast out the power of Satan, spirit of evil,
to deliver us from the kingdom of darkness,
and bring us into the splendour of your kingdom of light.

We pray for this child:

Set him (her) free from original sin,
make him (her) a temple of your glory,
and send your Holy Spirit to dwell with him (her)
(We ask this) through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Alternative B

Almighty God,
you sent your only Son
to rescue us from slavery to sin,
and to give us the freedom
only your sons and daughters enjoy.
We pray now for this child
who will have to face the world with
and fight the devil in all his cunning.
Your Son died and rose again to save us.
By his victory over sin and death,
cleanse this child from the stain of original sin.
Strengthen him (her) with the grace of Christ,
and watch over him (her) at every step in life's journey.
(We ask this) through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Anointing *The anointing with Oil of Catechumens also originated as a ceremony of preparation for adults who were to be baptised. In the ceremony of infant baptism it is seen to be a prayer for strength and healing. It is unlikely that we are praying for healing in the child at this stage (though this cannot be automatically discounted - a sensitive ear may detect anxieties). We pray that in the future the child may have that inner healing and strength which we all need at some time in our lives. In explaining this part it is useful to remember that oil of one kind or another is used as a basis for all kinds of soothing ointments and medicines.*

Blessing of the Water *Water is blessed for us in the sacrament. In the old rite the water that was blessed at Easter was kept throughout the year in one half of the baptismal font (there would be a division in the bowl). For each baptism some of this would be taken and mixed with some fresh water. This was done to remind us that Baptism is an Easter sacrament in which we share in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. There was a problem in that by the time six months or more had passed the Easter water had taken on an unpleasant appearance and odour.*

The rule was changed in the revision of the rite. While it is recommended to use Easter water in the Easter Season it is now permissible to bless fresh water at each ceremony. One of three prayers of blessing can be used: a) the one that is used on Easter night, b) and c) are shorter and include acclamations to be said or sung by the congregation - to encourage participation. If Easter water is being used the water is not blessed but a prayer of thanksgiving is said instead.

Anointing before Baptism

We anoint you with the oil of salvation
in the name of Christ our Saviour;
may he strengthen you with his power,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

Procession to the Baptistry

A hymn/processional song may be sung.

Blessing of the Water

There are alternatives:

Prayer of Blessing b)

Praise to you, almighty God and Father, for you have created water to cleanse and to give life. **Blessed be God.**
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, the Father's only Son, for you offered yourself on the cross, that in the blood and water flowing from your side, and through your death and resurrection, the Church might be born.

Blessed be God.

Praise to you, God the Holy Spirit, for you anointed Christ at his baptism in the waters of Jordan, so that we might all be baptized into you. **Blessed be God.**

Come to us, Lord, Father of all, and make holy this water which you have created, so that all who are baptised in it may be washed clean of sin and be born again to live as your children. **Hear us, Lord.**

Make this water holy, Lord, so that all who are baptised into Christ's death and resurrection by this water may become more perfectly like your Son. **Hear us, Lord.**

The celebrant touches the water with his right hand and continues:

Lord, make holy this water which you have created, so that all those whom you have chosen may be born again by the power of the Holy Spirit, and may take their place among your holy people. **Hear us, Lord.**

Prayer of Blessing c)

Father, God of mercy, through the waters of baptism you have filled us with new life as your very own children.

Blessed be God.

From all who are baptised in water and the Holy Spirit, you have formed one people, united in your Son, Jesus Christ.

Blessed be God.

You have set us free and filled our hearts with the Spirit of your love, that we may live in your peace.

Blessed be God.

You call those who have been baptised to announce the Good News of Jesus Christ to people everywhere.

Blessed be God.

You have called your child, N., to the cleansing of water and new birth, that by sharing the faith of your Church (s)he may have eternal life. Bless + this water in which (s)he will be baptised. We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Renunciation and Profession The parents and godparents speak of their own faith and commitment. In the old rite the questions were theoretically being asked of the child. Clearly such an act of commitment by a little one is not possible. Instead the parents and godparents are invited to 'renew now the vows of [their] own Baptism'.

It might be worth looking at the creed in the preparation session when exploring faith.

The text of the creed that is used is drawn from the Apostles' Creed one of the oldest professions of Christian faith that we have. It is not the same as the Creed most frequently used at Mass which was developed later as a more carefully phrased profession. This more basic one gets us right to the heart of what we believe.

Baptism

The words used for Baptism are drawn from Matthew Chapter 28. The formula is in the name of the Trinity and the Church sees this to be essential for a baptism to be valid - anyone can baptise in an emergency just so long as the proper words are said.

By Baptism in the name of the Trinity we express that the membership to which we are admitted is nothing less than the family of God. The Trinity, a community of love has drawn creation into existence so that we may share in the family love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit which has always existed. Participation in God's love is the promise held out to all human beings - baptism expresses and implants this reality made known by Jesus.

Water is a symbol of life, cleansing, quenching and death and destruction. It reminds us that we are perfected in Jesus with the new life of the one who satisfies our every need and who helps us die to sin and selfishness.

It is interesting to note that the formula does not end with 'Amen.' This word which roughly means 'so be it' is omitted because it is appropriate that the candidate

will 'say' it in his/her life as they live the Christian faith.

Renunciation of Sin & Profession of Faith

Do you reject Satan? **I do.**
And all his works? **I do.**
And all his empty promises? **I do.**

Do you believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth? **I do.**
Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father? **I do.**
Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting? **I do.**

This is our faith.

This is the faith of the Church.

We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Amen.

Is it your will that N. should be baptized in the faith of the Church which we have all professed with you? **It is.**

Baptism

N., I baptize you in the name of the father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.

The Ephphetha rite developed as a preparation for Baptism. In Saint Mark's Gospel there are indications that the cure was seen to be a kind of exorcism and so it fitted in with the practice of the early Church to cast out anything untoward in the candidate.

In the revision of the ceremony this rite was re-worked to become an explanatory gesture of what happens when we receive the sacrament and given its new place after the Baptism has occurred

Chrism *The oil used at this anointing is called 'chrism'. The name is a greek word meaning 'oil'. 'Christ' means the 'anointed one'. The child becomes another anointed one - another christ. Each of us must be a christ in the world for others.*

The prayer draws attention to three kinds of anointed people that are found in the Old Testament.

A priest – e.g. Moses was commanded by God to anoint Aaron as a priest - Exodus Chapter 29 verse 7.

A prophet – e.g. the prophet Elijah was told to anoint his successor, Elisha - first book of Kings Chapter 19 verse 16.

A king – e.g. Samuel anointed David the son of Jesse to be king - first book of Samuel Chapter 16 verse 13.

Baptism make us all priests, prophets and kings; the anointing sums up the dignity and duty that is conferred upon us.

a priest : one who must act as a go-between and an intercessor with God on behalf of others, who offers sacrifice in the Mass and in the self-giving of everyday life.

a prophet: one who must proclaim God's message to others

a king: one who shares in the kingdom and the rule of God.

White Garment *The white garment is usually a christening shawl. The prayer explains clearly what it signifies. Often shawls have been handed down over several generations. It may be possible to ask the parents whether they are using such a shawl and talk about which members of the family wore it at their baptism. This provides another opportunity to speak of the family of God.*

Candle *The meaning behind the sign of light hardly needs any explanation. Jesus, the Light of the World, enlightens all those who follow him. If one wishes to dwell on this part of the ceremony it might be useful to explain the Paschal Candle lit at Easter and kept in church as a reminder that Jesus is risen and that in Baptism we become sharers in his new, everlasting life. It is a powerful image that is not just an abstract idea. Jesus acts as a guide for us through the difficulties of life. When things seem to be at their darkest it is then that we must rely on his light to help us through. He, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, holds all time and space in his power and rescues us from all that would harm us, all that we fear.*

The baptismal candle is normally kept as a memento of the occasion. It is worth asking whether it should be just kept in a drawer to be brought out rarely or might it be lit at important moments e.g. Birthdays, First Holy Communion, First Reconciliation, Confirmation.

Ephphetha *In St. Mark's Gospel (Chapter 7 verses 31-37) we are told that Jesus healed a man who could neither hear nor speak. He put his fingers in his ears, spat and touched the mans mouth saying 'Ephphatha' that is be 'opened'.*

Explanatory Rites

Anointing after Baptism

The God of power and father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin, and brought you to new life through water and the Holy Spirit.

He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation, so that, united with his people, you may remain for ever a member of Christ who is priest, prophet and king. Amen.

Clothing with a White Garment

N., you have become a new creation, and have clothes yourself in Christ. See in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity. With your family and friends to help you by word and example, bring that dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven. Amen

Lighted Candle

Receive the light of Christ. Parents and godparents, this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. This child of yours has been enlightened by Christ. He (she) is to walk always as a child of the light. May he (she) go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.

Ephphetha

The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May he soon touch your ears to receive his word, and your mouth to proclaim his faith,

to praise the glory of God the father. Amen

The celebrant may use these or similar words. The purpose of this introduction to the Lord's Prayer is to draw out several important points.

Baptism is not the end of the sacramental life, in fact it is the beginning. We process to the sanctuary where the other sacraments of initiation will be celebrated: Confirmation and Eucharist. The Church is stressing the unity of the Sacraments of Initiation, they all form a single whole which celebrate and bring about our membership of Christ's body.

Baptism and the other Sacraments of Initiation make us children of God and in this privileged position we are given the right to pray to God as Father. Adopted as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ we have a duty to pray as members of the Body assembled around the altar.

The Lord's Prayer is one of those prayers we can share with Christians of other denominations. Often, at Baptism there are non-Catholic participants and it is very important to include them in the celebration. Praying with the words of Jesus can help us express our common Baptism. There needs to be sensitivity about the end of this prayer (viz. For thine is the kingdom...)

Blessing *There are four options to the prayer of blessing. All of them in some way mention the parents as well as the rest of the congregation. It is important that there is sensitivity in using some of the formulae. These prayers replace a prayer from an old rite often associated with Baptism held exclusively for the mother. This was referred to as the 'Churching'. It arose from pagan times when women who had recently given birth were seen as ritually impure. Many older people can still remember that there were some who would not allow a new mother into their homes until she had been churching. The Church decided that the prayer should be abolished as inappropriate and at the same time took the opportunity to include special prayers for both mother and father.*

Concluding Rite

There is a procession to the altar unless the baptism took place in the sanctuary. The lighted candle is carried for the child.

A song may be sung during the procession.

The celebrant speaks in these similar words:

Dearly beloved, this child has been reborn in baptism.

He (she) is now called the child of God, for so indeed he (she) is.

In confirmation he (she) will receive the fullness of God's Spirit. In holy communion he (she) will share the banquet of Christ's sacrifice, calling God his (her) Father in the midst of the Church.

In the name of this child, in the spirit of adopted children, let us pray together in these words our Lord has given us.

Our Father

Blessing

This is the first of four alternative sets of Blessing.

God the Father,

through his Son, the Virgin Mary's child,

has brought joy to all Christian mothers,

as they see the hope of eternal life shine on their children.

May he bless the mother of this child.

May she be one with her child in thanking God for ever

in heaven,

in Christ Jesus, our Lord. **Amen.**

God is the giver of all life, human and divine.

May he bless the father of this child.

He and his wife will be the first teachers of their child in the ways of faith.

May they be also the best of teachers,

bearing witness to the faith

by what they say and do

in Christ Jesus, our Lord. **Amen.**

By God's gift, through water and the Holy Spirit, we are reborn to everlasting life.

In his goodness,

may he continue to pour out his blessings upon all present, who are his sons and daughters.

May he make them always,

wherever they may be,
faithful members of his holy people.
May he send his peace upon all who are gathered here
in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

May almighty God bless you all,
the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**