

## Baptism, by Father David Cybulski

I do quite a bit of preparation for many of the seven sacraments. The sacraments are of course gifts of God. When God bestows His gifts upon us He also gives us responsibility. It occurs to me that frequently those approaching the sacraments are unaware of what is occurring either because they have not been taught or they have forgotten. It has been on my heart to write a little bit about each of the sacraments, and as summer approaches I have an opportunity over the next several weeks to do just that. It is fitting to begin with Baptism because Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life and Baptism gives us access to the rest of the sacraments.

In order to understand the necessity of Baptism it is a good idea to examine original sin through the words of St. Paul. "By one man's disobedience many [that is, all men] were made sinners": "sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned..." (Rom. 5:12, 19). The story of salvation history and consequently the bible is that God would send a Redeemer to undo universally the sin of Adam, so Paul continues "Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men" (Rom. 5:18). Through Baptism, original sin and indeed all sins are forgiven. It is necessary and we as Christians have a duty to proclaim the Gospel so that all will know God's plan of salvation.

Water is a powerful symbol. It is a symbol of life because every creature needs water to live. It is also a symbol of death because if we are submerged under water we drown. In this, Baptism signifies a communion with Christ's death. "If, then, we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Rom. 6:8). Many churches have large baptismal fonts in which a person is baptized through triple immersion, a powerful symbol of dying and rising. Since ancient times Baptism has been conferred equally through a pouring of water three times over a person's head accompanied by the words "N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

In a sacrament, the invisible reality that the sacraments points to becomes present. In Baptism we really receive the life of the Most Holy Trinity. We are changed. We receive an indelible mark on our soul. "The newly baptized is now, in the only Son, a child of God entitled to say the prayer of the children of God: 'Our Father'" (CCC 1243).

Through Baptism we become members of the Body of Christ. Here is a striking statement in the catechism. "Having become a member of the Church, the person baptized belongs no longer to himself, but to Him who died and rose for us" (CCC 1269). When we were baptized either we or our parents gave us completely over to Christ. We may meditate today if we live our lives correspondingly. Furthermore, the unity of the Body of Christ means that we are responsible for each other through a life of service.

In Baptism we become a new creation. We belong to God. One first consideration is what we name our child. The catechism reminds us our name is a name for eternity (CCC 2159). We are encouraged to give a name of a saint who has lived a life of exemplary fidelity to the Lord. We are asking for virtues of that saint for our child, and we are giving our child a patron who will pray for him or her for life. Baptismal names that express Christian mysteries of Christian virtues are also very appropriate.

After Baptism our faith must grow. It is the reason we renew our baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil. In the case of infants it is the responsibility of parents that they will provide a genuine education in the faith. They promise to be the first teachers in the way of faith. Baptism is just the beginning of that life lived in Christ and Christ through others, and the newly baptized will need guidance in a world that is by its own nature not Christian in example. It becomes problematic when parents who do not practice their faith present a child for Baptism, for Baptism is not a mere social convention. For the same reasons godparents are required to be Catholics active in their faith so they may assist in passing on our Catholic beliefs. Someone who is not Catholic may act as a witness as long as there is one Catholic godparent.

During the rite of Baptism, the celebrant anoints with chrism. "As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as members of his body, sharing everlasting life." To be priest, prophet, and king is just not Father's role. A priest intercedes for others and offers sacrifice. Likewise all of us are to pray for others, and we are to offer our own personal sacrifices to God. The place of a priest is at liturgy, which because of our Baptism, we cannot miss! As prophet we are to speak the Word of God. Religion is not a private matter because we are made into prophets at Baptism. Do people know that we are Catholic because we are living out our faith? Do we read the Word of God? A king orders things so that people can find their mission, i.e. God. Do we encourage people especially our children in holiness so that they may grow closer to God? That is our prophetic mission.

In baptism we receive a white garment and are told to bring our Christian dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven. By our baptism we are to live upright lives. At our funeral Mass our family drapes a white garment over our body. We have that symbolism to remind us we are set apart for Christ. We are all called to a life of holiness that is restored in reconciliation when we need it and always strengthened by the Eucharist.

Baptism is necessary for salvation. A line from the catechism comforts me when thinking of anyone who has not been baptized. "God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments." We can only teach what Christ gave us, which is the sacraments; however, we always trust in God who is infinitely merciful and loves us more than we can imagine.

**May God bless you,  
Fr. David Cybulski**