

Questions about Godparents

What is the role of the Sponsor (Godparent)?

The sponsor's role is to "assist an adult in Christian initiation, or together, with the parents, to present an infant at the baptism, and who will help the baptized to lead a Christian life in harmony with baptism, and to fulfill the obligations connected with it." (Can. 872). Therefore, when one is asked to be a sponsor they are being given the great responsibility of being able to assist, or, as noted, in a dire situation, take over the responsibility of the parent in raising the child in the faith.

How Many Sponsors (Godparents) Can There Be?

While many parents would like to have multiple sponsors, Canon Law only allows for "one male or one female sponsor or one of each sex." (Can. 873).

Who Can Be A Sponsor (Godparent)?

The role of a sponsor is not only a great honor but, indeed, also a great responsibility. As a result, in order for one to function as a sponsor as per Canon 874, a person must:

- 1) Be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents (in case of infant Baptism), or the one who takes their place (guardian) or, in their absence, by the pastor or minister and have the qualifications in fulfilling that role.
- 2) Have completed their 16th year, unless the bishop requires a different age or the pastor or minister makes an exception with just cause.
- 3) Be a Catholic who has been Baptized, Confirmed, has received the sacrament of the Most Holy Eucharist and who practices their faith regularly.
- 4) Be in good standing with the Church.
- 5) Not be a father or mother to the one to be baptized.

Can a Baptized Non-Catholic be a Sponsor (Godparent)?

A non-Catholic cannot function as a sponsor because of the hope of raising the child Catholic. However, a baptized non-Catholic can serve as a "witness to baptism...with a Catholic sponsor." That is why, when choosing godparents, it is imperative that one of the godparents be both baptized and a practicing Catholic if the other godparent is a Christian Witness.

Can Someone Act as a Proxy for a Sponsor (Godparent)?

Yes, one may act as a proxy for a sponsor, provided the same requirements of a sponsor exist for the proxy.

The Oils of Baptism

The Oil of Catechumens.

The Oil of Catechumens has been used for centuries in connection with the sacrament of baptism. It is to symbolize that the child has now become a catechumen, that is, they, from that moment on, will be instructed in the faith, first by the parents and godparents and then by the Church, especially through Religious Education. That is why the priest makes the sign of the cross upon the breast of the person to be baptized, because that child now has the "heart" of a catechist.

The Holy Chrism.

At the Chrism Mass, during Holy Week, every parish is given three oils, the oil of the Catechumenate, the oil of the infirm and the Sacred Chrism. The person to be baptized is anointed after the pouring of the water with this Sacred oil. Its use is required in the consecration of a Bishop, and the ordination of a priest. Since Baptism makes us sharers in the priesthood of Christ, Chrism reminds us that we are baptized as priest, prophet and king.

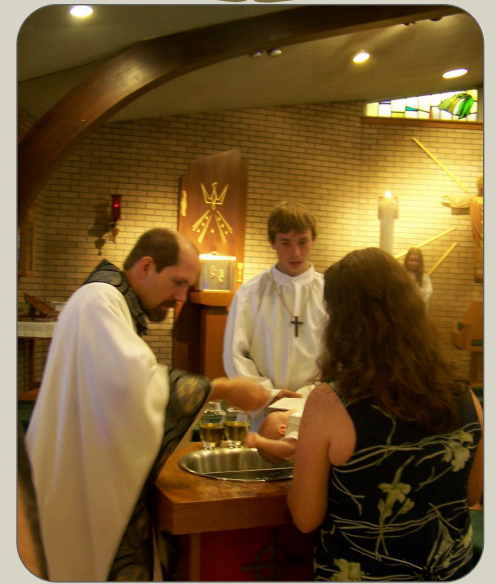
Given all of this, it should be clear to see the importance, the beauty and the sacredness of the sacrament of Baptism. For, while there is a temptation to see the sacrament as the end of one's involvement in the Church, it truly is just the beginning. The parents and godparents are given an exciting and a very important role of teaching the child the faith, and, by doing so, growing in their own faith as well.

By teaching we learn and by experiencing we bring our experiences to others, so that the more we, ourselves grow in holiness, the more we can instill those steps to holiness to our children. That is why a baptism is not just for the one being baptized, but for everyone, that we may be reminded of our own baptismal promises, that we live those promises and seek to bring, as that newly baptized child or adult, the white garment back to Christ unstained by sin but stained by the blood of Christ who invites us always to be with Him in Heaven.

Therefore, take time in selecting godparents, take time in learning your faith, take time in understanding Baptism. For, by doing so, you can have the joy of leading your child in holiness and growing in holiness yourself, so that, this day becomes more than a day of celebration at a restaurant but a day for you to appreciate what God has done for all of us in giving us this sacrament, in being baptized Himself. Because, by Baptism your child becomes a child of God, and a child who has teaches us all why we are here and why Baptism is so important for your lives as parents, for the child's life, and, indeed, for the life of the Church.

Fr. Brian

BAPTISM



The Sacrament of Baptism

One of the most popular, but often misunderstood, sacraments of the Church, is, indeed, the sacrament of Baptism. While the sacrament itself has gone through many changes in how it is done and when, the essential element of immersion in water and the conferral of the Holy Spirit has always remained. In fact, the word itself is a variation of the Greek word baptizo, which simply means "immersion" and, when Jesus sent the Apostles out into the world, to "make disciples of all nations," He did so, reminding them that they are to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

What is Baptism?

Baptism is one of the seven sacraments of the Church and one of three, of what the Church calls, the sacraments of initiation, that is, Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation. Baptism recalls how Christ 'drowned' in suffering and death and rose again to new life. In the ceremony itself, the sin of our first parents (Adam and Eve) is washed away and we emerge being made pure in God's eyes.

Historically, Baptism used to occur by the riverside, whereby the priest or minister would take the one to be baptized and immerse them underwater. However, the one to be baptized would be dunked for a good length of time so that they would be baptized in the name of the Father... The Son... and the Holy Spirit. Once the newly baptized emerged, after having experiencing the closeness to death, they, like Christ, arose to "new life".

Incidentally, this was during the time when Baptism happened in adulthood, during the course of history, however, the Church saw fit, especially given the danger of death in their young age, to baptize infants. Also, since, we are born with Original Sin, it was and is important that sin be removed sooner than later, so that, in the words of St. Vincent Ferrer, a great Spanish missionary: "Every baptized person should consider that it is in the womb of the Church where he is transformed from a child of Adam to a child of God."

This is why Canon Law, the law of Church states: "Parents are obliged to see to it that infants are baptized within the first weeks after birth; as soon as possible after birth or even before it parents are to go to the pastor to request the sacrament for their child and to be properly prepared for it." (Can. 867)

Undoing our Baptism?

There is a growing trend, especially among atheists to be "de-baptized" whereby, it is believed that they are "undoing" their baptism. However, in the Church, there are three sacraments that bestow what is called an "indelible mark" upon our soul. Those three are Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Orders. What that means is that no matter what we do, we can never remove, undo, or redo what was put upon our soul forever. "A baptized person belongs forever to Christ. He is marked with the indelible seal of Christ." (character) (*Catechism of the Catholic Church Compendium, 265*).

Questions about Baptism

Why Are We Baptized?

The Church states that in being baptized all original sin is removed, all personal sins and all punishments due to sin are also removed. Further, it makes the baptized person a participant in the divine life of the Trinity through sanctifying grace, the grace... that incorporates one into Christ and His Church. It also gives a share in the priesthood of Christ and provides the basis for communion with all Christians, while bestowing the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. (*CCC 1262-1280*)

Who Can Be Baptized?

Any person who has not yet been baptized can be baptized. In terms of adults, they have to "have manifested the will to receive baptism, be sufficiently instructed in the truths of the faith and... have sorrow for personal sin." (Can. 865) In terms of infants, those questions are dealt with below.

How can an Infant make a Baptismal Promise?

In the Roman Catholic Church baptism usually occurs during infancy, this is called infant baptism. Parents and the godparents make the promises of baptism on behalf of the child until they are old enough to profess their own belief. In fact, in the Rite of Baptism itself it states: "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." And, further on, addressing the godparents it states: "Are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents?"

How is one Baptized?

Baptism is conferred by a deacon, priest or bishop and is done so by immersion in water or pouring of water upon one's head. While a catechist or someone else can baptize, they can only do so if they have been "deputed by the local ordinary (Bishop) or in case of necessity." (Can. 861). What that means is the bishop has to grant permission, provided a deacon, priest or bishop is not available or if there is the danger of death.

When can Baptism be Celebrated?

While Baptism can be celebrated on any day of the week, the preferred day is on Sunday or, if possible, on the Easter Vigil. Typically, Baptisms do not occur during the season of Lent, given its penitential nature and that the days are more solemn in anticipation of Easter Sunday.

Where can Baptism be Celebrated?

Canon 857 states: "Outside a case of necessity, the proper place for baptism is a church or oratory." As a rule, it also states that, in case of an adult, one should be baptized in their own parish church or, in the case of an infant, one should be baptized in the church proper to their parents, "unless a just cause suggests otherwise." Furthermore, Canon 860 states: "Outside the case of necessity, baptism is not to be conferred in private homes, unless the local ordinary (bishop) has this for a grave cause."

What Conditions Must Exist for a Baptism to be Licit (Official)?

Canon 868 states that there are two very important conditions that must exist. First, the parents, "or at least one of them or the person who lawfully takes their place" must give their consent. Furthermore, it is believed that "there be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion; if such hope is lacking, the baptism is to be put off according to the prescriptions of particular law and the parents are to be informed of the reason." In fact, this is the primary function of the parents to raise the child in the faith in anticipation of them learning more about their faith when they attend Religious Education.

Can Someone Be "Re-Baptized?"

If someone was validly baptized, whether, in the Catholic or non-Catholic Church, there is no need to be re-baptized. There is a caveat to that, however, it is important that when one was baptized the correct formula was used. That is, the person had to be immersed or water had to be poured upon them and the exact words "I Baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit," were used.

Symbols of Baptism

Sign of the Cross – Given by the priest or deacon, the parents and godparents in order to claim the child for Christ.

Water – A symbol not just of purity, or cleansing, but also of life and the Holy Spirit. For, while water nourishes and sustains life, spiritually speaking, when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon us it brings us new life in Christ, and makes us His son or daughter.

White Garment (Bib) - White is a not just a sign of purity, it is also sign of Christ as well, so that when the one who has been baptized they, literally, put on, in the words of St. Paul, the new man or woman, putting on the very garment of Christ.

Paschal Candle – The candle is a symbol of Christ the Light. Therefore, one of the godparents is asked to light their candle from the Paschal Candle as a symbol of them carrying on the light of Christ on behalf of the one being baptized.

Words – "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." These are the key words in the ceremony when the water is poured over the baby's head and that which makes the Baptism valid.