

## BAPTISM INSTRUCTION

### WHY DO WE BAPTIZE PERSONS?

Because Jesus has asked us to.

Jesus came forward and addressed the eleven disciples in these words:

*"Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth; go therefore and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name 'of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of time!"* Mt 28, 18-20

### I

#### THE BEGINNING OF THE RITE

At the beginning of the rite of Baptism the priest or deacon asks the parents and godparents three questions. Since you are responding on behalf of the child your responses need to be clear and strong not weak sounding or hesitant..

#### 1) What name do you give your child?

God created each and everyone to express a quality of His Beauty and Truth. He knows us personally. He wants us to be in a special relationship with him. Names not only identify us as particular persons they call "to be" in particular way. We are called to be in relationship with God our Father through and with Christ our Lord and brother.

#### 2) What do you ask of God's Church?

Baptism is one of the sacraments of initiation. In Baptism original sin which we inherited from our first parents is washed away. We are re-born by water and the Spirit. We become a part of God's family; brothers and sisters with Christ. We are Baptized into Christ. After Baptism whenever God sees your child he also sees Christ. God calls us to live as Jesus did.

#### 3) Are you ready to bring up your child to keeps God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and neighbor?

What kinds of things can parents and godparents do to foster an atmosphere of love of God and neighbor? Children learn more from observation than from lecturing. If God is important in your lives than your child will learn that in life God is a priority. Will you attend weekly Mass, participate in other sacraments?

## II WE LISTEN TO THE WORD OF GOD FROM SCRIPTURE

God's Word is alive and forms us as we listen with hungry hearts. The priest or deacon explains the meaning of the sacrament during the homily and challenges us to live as God's sons and daughters. How will you model the faith for your child/godchild?

## III THE WHOLE CHURCH IS PRESENT WHENEVER WE PRAY . . .

We offer prayers and petitions to God on behalf of the child about to be baptized and for the whole community. When we pray the Church in its entirety prays. The entire church is comprised of three parts.

Those perfected in heaven.

Those who are saved but are being purified in purgatory.

We who are still on pilgrimage on earth.

When we speak of Church (a community of those who belong to Christ), we mean also those who have gone before us. Death does not break the bonds of love that we forged during life on earth. Not only special Saint friends but family members who have died are present to pray with us for the well being of the children being Baptized. The whole community is vested in the success of the newly Baptized Christians. In the person of the Priest or Deacon, the Church pledges that she will do all she can to support the newly Baptized on his/her journey to the Lord.

## IV CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

### 1) Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith . . . Renewal of Baptismal Promises.

*"Let your 'yes' mean 'yes' and your 'no' mean 'no'"*

Based upon the Creed which we recite every Sunday after the homily, the parents and godparents are asked questions about their commitment to the faith. *Do you reject Satan? And ALL his works?* They are responding on behalf of the children being Baptized. Say and live out what you mean. Your response to the questions of faith asked by the priest or deacon should be loud and clear.

### 2) Water as a symbol

Water is a powerful symbol. It can give life. Imagine it is a very hot day and you have just cut the grass. A tall glass of cold water is refreshing. Imagine being in a dessert without water. Water is necessary to sustain life. Water can also kill. Remember the deluge in the Bible story or the Egyptians who drowned after Moses caused the waters of the Red Sea to fall back to their natural state. The use of water in the Baptismal rite recalls Christ's death and resurrection. The

ancient Church used a pool for immersion. One walked down into the water was immersed three times and then the person walked out of the pool. Jesus goes down into the realm of death and then comes back to life. We are Baptized into Christ's death. Why? Did he remain dead? If we have died with him we will rise with him. The priest or deacon will ask you: "Do you wish your child to be Baptized in the faith you just professed?"

### **3) CHRISM, the rich gift**

*"Set me as a seal upon your heart. . ."*

We are Baptized into Christ. As Christ was anointed King, Priest and Prophet, as co-heirs we share in this ministry also. Oil creates a permanent bond with whatever it comes into contact with. The seal of Baptism is forever. Baptism is permanent. Whereas we can receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist as well as anointing of the sick more than once, we receive some sacraments only once. Baptism is one of those sacraments. After Baptism, whenever God looks upon the Baptized person He sees Christ. The oil represents the mark; permanent seal upon the soul which signifies that we have been saved by Christ and we are one with Him in calling God our Father. As St Paul has written, we belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God. The Baptized person is claimed for Christ for all eternity. How will you help your baby live as a child of the Father? How are you living out this mystery?

### **4) THE CLOTHING OF THE WHITE GARMENT. . .**

A white garment is given to your child which signifies that the Baby is a new creation; freed from original sin; free to live as God wants us to. The baptism rite encourages parents and godparents to see to it that their newly baptized child bring this newly created self unstained into everlasting life.

### **5) CHRIST OUR LIGHT . . .**

Christ said "I am the light of the world." He also said that *we* are light. In baptism the child shares in Christ ministry of being light in darkness. Godparents are asked to light a special candle on behalf of the child as a symbol. It is the light of God's eternal life which is given. Parents and godparents are asked to help the child keep this light burning brightly.

### **6) WE EXPRESS OUR COMMON SONSHIP WITH CHRIST AS WE PRAY THE *OUR FATHER***

### **7) PRAYERS OVER THE MOTHER, FATHER AND GODPARENTS AND DISMISSAL**

We pray that God will help the parents and godparents be good role models. This means that God is a priority in their lives. The child's role models need to attend weekly Mass, receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist regularly; in short to model the behavior there are trying to foster in their child. After this prayer we are asked to "go in the peace of Christ".

## **Secular vs. Church Vision of godparents**

The word "godparent" has different meanings in the secular world and the Church. In secular usage, the term "godparent" is an honor bestowed upon someone close to the family. The godparent is often understood to be a potential guardian should anything tragic ever befall the parents. Godparents often remember their godchildren with gifts on birthdays and holidays.

The Church's understanding of the term "godparent" focuses less upon the honorary and guardian roles and more upon the spiritual bond that exists between a godparent and godchild. A godparent's primary responsibility is one of intercession for his/her godchild. Not only when intentionally praying for their godchild, but also every time a godparent participates in the sacraments and prayer, his/her godchild is presented before the Lord.

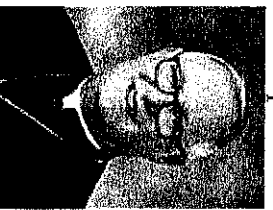
A godparent also assists a godchild as they grow in their Faith as a resource of understanding and as a witness of Christian living. As such, the Church requires godparents to have completed the sixteenth year of age, has received full initiation in the Church (having received the sacraments of Baptism, First Communion, and Confirmation), is a registered and active member of a Catholic parish, and if married, married in a sacramental bond recognized by the Church. A sponsor certificate is a testimony from the priest that a person is a registered parishioner, faithfully attending weekly Mass, and participating in the life of the parish.

The Church requires at least one godparent to be a Roman Catholic in good standing. If there are two godparents, they must be one male and one female. A person baptized into a non-Catholic, Christian church may serve as a Christian witness. However, a baptized Catholic who worships at a non-Catholic church is not eligible to serve as a godparent or a Christian witness.

Sacramental marriage is often the primary issue that arises regarding godparents. A sacramental marriage for Catholics must have been performed by a Catholic priest within a Church. A divorced Catholic remains eligible to serve as a godparent. However, a divorced person remarried outside of the Catholic Church or a person civilly married is not eligible. A Catholic married in a non-Catholic church is also ineligible.

The Lord encounters us where we are and invites us to deepen our relationship with Him and His Church. Baptisms are often an opportunity the Lord uses to address irregularities with the Church. If you have been asked to serve as a godparent and currently are not eligible for any reason, please speak with a parish priest.

## Without A Doubt Godparents: Helpers on the road of faith Bishop Tobin Rhode Island Catholic



Without a doubt Baptism is an important and joyful occasion – for the person being baptized and for members of the family and the entire Church community. In preparing for Baptism, however, one of the first questions parents encounter is the selection of godparents.

It's about the choice and role of godparents that I write today. But first, a few words about the meaning of Baptism.

Baptism, of course, is the primary sacrament of the Christian Faith, the foundation upon which the entire Christian life is built. When we're baptized, the original sin with which we are born as children of Adam and Eve is taken away, we are filled with sanctifying grace, and we become members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

But Baptism is only a beginning! For Baptism to achieve its full potential, it has to be followed by a lifetime of grace and faith. In presenting their child for Baptism, parents promise to practice the Catholic Faith and to do everything possible to share their faith with their children. How sad and inconsistent it is when parents request Baptism for their children and then walk away from the Church with little or no intention of returning anytime soon.

Supporting parents in the practice of the faith is the particular responsibility of the godparents of the child being baptized. Sometimes, however, it seems that the role of godparents is not properly understood, even by practicing Catholics. (For the sake of simplicity here I use the term "godparent" and "sponsor" interchangeably.)

First, a word about what godparents should *not* be. The role of godparent is not an honor given to a favorite aunt, uncle or lifetime friend. ("I've known John forever; he's a really great guy and I want him to be the godfather of my child.") Nor is it a reward in exchange for another favor. ("I was the maid-of-honor at her wedding and I want to thank her by asking her to be my baby's godmother.") Nor does it entail the bestowal of a legal right or duty to raise the child to adulthood should "something happen" to the parents.

Being a godparent for Baptism is a serious spiritual responsibility and a commitment of faith. (All that we say here about Baptism sponsors also applies to Confirmation sponsors by the way.)

Because it is such an important role, the *Code of Canon Law* describes some of the requirements for being a Baptism sponsor.

First it reminds us that, "Only one male or one female sponsor, or one of each sex is to be employed." (#873) It is not permissible to have two godfathers or two godmothers.

The next canon (#874) lists the specific requirements for being a sponsor, which can be summarized as follows:

- Normally be at least 16 years old;
- Have already received the three sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist;
- Be a Catholic in good standing, someone who leads a life in harmony with the Catholic Faith;
- Not be the parents of the person being baptized.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* offers a broader, more pastoral description of the role of godparents: "For the grace of Baptism to unfold, the parents' help is important. So too is the role of the godfather and godmother, who must be firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized – child or adult – on the road of Christian life." (#1255)

This description is reflected in the Baptism ceremony when the celebrant turns to the godparents and asks, "Are you ready to help the parents of this child in their duty as Christian parents?" And they respond, "We are." And later in the Rite the godparents join the parents in "renouncing Satan, his works and all his empty promises" and professing their faith on behalf of the one being baptized.

All of this emphasizes that the role of the godparent goes well beyond the ceremony itself, it's meant to last a lifetime. What does the Catechism mean, exactly, when it says that godparents must be "firm believers, able and ready to help the newly baptized on the road of Christian life?"

Well, the Christian life is just that – a road, a journey, a pilgrimage, and with so many challenges, temptations and distractions these days it can be a very difficult road to travel. Every Christian needs the example and support of the community, represented especially by their godparents, if they are to travel the Christian highway safely and successfully.

In practical terms, then, that means that godparents must be faithful members of the Church, regularly attending Mass and receiving the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation. Godparents should give a good example of a moral life, keeping the Commandments of the Lord and the precepts of the Church. Their lives should be shining examples of integrity, charity, justice and compassion. Godparents should try to be present to the person they've sponsored, praying for them and with them, affirming them in the practice of the Christian Faith and even challenging them if they're ever tempted to leave the "road of the Christian life." That's a pretty serious job description, isn't it? Nonetheless, that's exactly what's involved in being a sacramental sponsor in the Church. So, if at some point you need to choose godparents for your child, choose carefully, with these points in mind. And if you're asked to be a godparent, congratulations – it's a real honor and privilege. But before you accept the invitation, be sure you're willing and able to live up to the expectations your position demands.