

The Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults

by Fr. Antony

Baptism Part II

From the time of the apostles, becoming a Christian has been accomplished in several stages. It should be considered a journey. The essential elements in this process are the proclamation of the Word, the acceptance of the Gospel that brings about conversion, a profession of faith, Baptism itself, admission to Eucharistic communion, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The meaning and grace of the sacrament of Baptism are clearly seen in the rites of its celebration. The sign of the cross on the forehead, on the threshold of the celebration, marks with the imprint of Christ, the one who is going to belong to him and signifies the grace of the redemption Christ won for us by his cross.

The proclamation of the Word of God enlightens the candidates and the assembly with the revealed truth and elicits the response of faith, which is inseparable from Baptism. Baptism is “the sacrament of faith” in a particular way, since it is the sacramental entry into the life of faith.

Since Baptism signifies liberation from sin and from its instigator the devil, one or more exorcisms are pronounced over the candidate. The celebrant then anoints him with the oil of catechumens, or lays his hands on him, and he explicitly renounces Satan. Thus prepared, he is able to confess the faith of the Church, to which he will be “entrusted” by Baptism.

The baptismal water is consecrated by a prayer of epiclesis (either at this moment or at the Easter Vigil). The Church asks God that through his Son the power of the Holy Spirit may be sent upon the water, so that those who will be baptized in it may be “born of water and the Spirit.”

The essential rite of the sacrament follows next. It signifies and actually brings about death to sin and entry into the life of the Most Holy Trinity through configuration to the Paschal mystery of Christ. Baptism is performed in the most expressive way by immersion or pouring the water three times over the candidate’s head, accompanied by the minister’s words: “N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

This is followed by anointing with sacred chrism, (perfumed oil) consecrated by the bishop. It signifies the gift of the Holy Spirit to the newly baptized, who has become a Christian, that

is, one “anointed” by the Holy Spirit, incorporated into Christ who is anointed priest, prophet, and king.

In the liturgy of the Eastern Churches, the post-baptismal anointing is the sacrament of Chrismation (Confirmation). In the Roman liturgy the post-baptismal anointing announces a second anointing with sacred chrism to be conferred later by the bishop.

The candidate is given a white garment to symbolize that the person baptized has “put on Christ,” has risen with Christ. A candle is given to the candidate, in child baptism this candle is entrusted to the parents and godparents, lit from the Pascal candle, signifying that Christ has enlightened the neophyte (or newly converted). In him the baptized are “the light of the world.”

The newly baptized, a child of God, is now entitled to say the prayer of the children of God: **“Our Father.”** Having become a child of God, now clothed with the wedding garment, the neophyte is now eligible to be admitted “to the marriage supper of the Lamb” and receives the food of the new life, the body and blood of Christ, the Holy Eucharist. The solemn blessing concludes the celebration of Baptism.

The Baptism Of Infants

Born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also have need of the new birth. In Baptism, they are freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children of God. Infant Baptism requires a post-baptismal catechumenate, which is essential for flowering of baptismal graces.

In Baptism, infants are incorporated into Christ, not through an act of their own will, as in the adult baptism, but through an act of the sponsor who represents the Church and assume responsibility for the spiritual education of the infant. The parents, of course, must consent to the baptism; the Church refuses to baptize anyone against his or her will, or even to baptize an infant unless there is some guarantee that the child will be raised in the faith. Unlike the adult baptism the parents renounce the Satan and profess the faith with church for the child.

In the Eastern rites the Christian initiation of infants also begins with Baptism followed immediately by Confirmation and the Eucharist, while in the Roman rite it is followed by years of catechesis before the Eucharist and Confirmation - the summit of their Christian initiation. Here we should not forget that the Eastern Churches have a solemn celebration of the Holy Eucharist when the child attains the age of reason.

During the final blessing at the Baptism of newborns, a special prayer is said for both the mother and Father of the child.