

INTRODUCTION TO THE CELEBRATION OF INFANT BAPTISM

The Celebration of the sacrament of Baptism for infants is a community celebration. Celebration during the Sunday Liturgy is a proper time for this celebration. If the Sacrament is celebrated at another time every effort should be made to keep the communal aspect of the sacrament. If the sacrament of Baptism is to be celebrated out side of a Mass care must be taken to see that liturgical principles are observed during these celebrations. Lectors and Music minister should be used. Family members should be used as long as they have the necessary skills and training to fulfill that ministry. The communal nature of the Sacrament should call for as much participation by the families and the community as possible.

The Rite of Baptism For Children

RECEPTION OF THE CHILDREN

After the congregation is assembled, the celebrant and ministers proceed to the door of the church or go to that part of the church where the parents and godparents are waiting with those who are to be baptized. The celebrant should be vested in alb or surplice, stole, and if he wishes, a cope. The stole and cope should be of festive color. [35, 74, 107, 132]

Greeting

The celebrant greets all present, especially the parents and godparents, using his own words and emphasizing the significance of the occasion. [36, 75, 108, 133]

Questioning

The celebrant questions the parent(s) of each child about the child's name and about their purpose in bringing the child to the church. [37, 76, 108, 133] Then he questions the parent(s) as to their willingness to accept responsibility for the Christian education of their child, and he questions the godparents concerning their willingness to assist the parents in this task. [39-40, 77-78, 108-10, 134-135] Questions may be asked in the words of the rite [37ff] or in similar words.

Formal Acceptance & Signing With The Cross

The celebrant, in the name of the whole Christian community, welcomes the children into the Church and claims them for Christ. He then traces the sign of the cross on the forehead of each child; the parents and godparents do the same. [41, 79, 111, 136]

Pastoral Applications

The whole rite of reception highlights the role of baptism as initiation into the community of the Church.

The reception should lend a sense of solemnity and celebration to the whole rite, as well as indicating the willingness of the Church to go to meet the person who desires to become a member of the body of Christ. The assembly should either move to the place of reception or at least turn to face the reception.

When baptism is celebrated during Mass, the rite of reception serves as the entrance rite and takes the place of the usual greeting and penitential rite. [29.1]

These opening remarks are intended to indicate briefly the meaning and significance of the rite which is about to be celebrated. The initial greeting reminds parents of the initial joy with which they welcomed their children as gifts from God, the source of life, who now wishes to bestow his own life on these little ones.

This brief questioning emphasizes the intention of the parent(s) in bringing this child to the Church for baptism and their commitment to raise the child in the Catholic faith. The questions should be worded in such a way that the parents can respond easily and comfortably, without any embarrassment or confusion.

When there are large numbers, some of the questions maybe asked of the whole group at once. [108]

By this symbolic act, the parents and the celebrant as a representative of the church community indicate the purpose for which the assembly is gathered: to incorporate this child into the community of God's saving activity through Christ.

When there are large numbers, the sign of the cross can be made over all at the same time, and then the parents sign their own child. [111]

(Procession)

If the liturgy of the word is to be held in another part of the church, all move to that place in procession.

The procession to the place the word will be proclaimed indicates a movement to a new part of the rite. The procession might include an incense-bearer (if incense is to be used), cross-bearer, paschal candle-bearer, book-bearer, and lector/readers.

An appropriate song might be sung by the congregation as the procession moves to the place where the word will be proclaimed. When celebrated during Mass the celebrant continues with the Gloria and the opening prayer.

CELEBRATION OF GOD'S WORD

Readings

Readings from sacred scripture appropriate for the celebration of baptism are listed in the rite. [44, 186-194, 204-215] One or more readings may be selected, but a gospel reading should always be done. It might be best to structure the liturgy of the word in the same form as at Sunday Mass with an appropriate responsorial psalm and gospel acclamation.

When baptism is celebrated at Mass, the readings are either from the Mass of the Sunday or from the baptismal rite or a combination of both. [29] On Sundays of Advent, Lent, and Easter, the readings prescribed for that day are used; however, on days when a ritual Mass is prohibited, one of the readings may be taken from the texts in the celebration of baptism for children. In the Christmas season or Ordinary Time the readings may also be taken from those given in the Lectionary for Mass [757-761] or in the baptismal rite. [nos. 44, 186-215] [29.2a]

The liturgy of the word should be celebrated in a place where all can be seated, if possible, and where all can hear the readings clearly.

The liturgy of the word is directed toward stirring up the faith of the parents, godparents, and congregation and toward praying in common for the fruits of baptism.[17] Baptism is a faith response to the word of God, so it is particularly appropriate that the word be read during the celebration of baptism. Besides indicating the relationship between the word, faith, and baptism, the liturgy of the word also helps those present to understand the symbolism and significance of this celebration.

The readings should be chosen, if possible, in consultation with the parents as should the other options in the rite. The suggested readings and responses for baptism are given in full in the Lectionary for Mass.

Response

After the reading (if there is one) or between the readings (if there are two or more) all present may respond with a responsorial psalm. A number of options are listed in the rite. [195-203]

The gospel acclamation is sung before the proclamation of the gospel.

The people of God participate in the liturgy of the word through listening to the scripture readings and through singing the responsorial psalm and gospel acclamation. The psalm should be selected in relation to the other scripture readings; the psalm is best sung. Music should facilitate the full, active participation of the assembly; therefore, the music should be easy to learn and sing. It might be helpful to use a setting that most of those present already know or one which can be easily learned.

The gospel acclamation is always sung; if not sung, it is to be omitted.

Homily

A short homily should follow the readings, explaining them and attempting to lead those present to a deeper understanding of the sacrament of baptism and the responsibilities which flow from it. [45, 82, 113, 138]

The homily is an integral part of the liturgy of the word; it is intended to explain the readings and to indicate their application to the particular community gathered for this celebration. Thus, it serves to prepare the assembly, often explicitly, for the celebration of the sacrament itself.

When baptism is celebrated during Mass and the Sunday readings have been used, the homily should link them to the baptism about to take place. [29]

A short period of reflective silence is recommended after the homily. [46, 83]

Creed

When baptism is celebrated during Mass, the creed is not said since the profession of faith by the whole community before baptism takes its place. [29]

Intercessions

The prayers of the faithful are offered with the people responding. The celebrant may speak the opening invitation to prayer and another minister may read the petitions. The petitions are chosen from those listed in the rite [47, 217-230] ; petitions for the universal Church and the needs of the world should be added.

In the general intercessions, the faithful exercise their priestly function by praying for those about to be baptized, for the local community, for the whole church, and for all people.

The petitions should be chosen and/or composed in consultation with the parents, and they may be read by a person other than the presider, perhaps by a member or friend of the family.

Invocation of the Saints

The prayer of the faithful concludes with a short litany of the saints instead of the usual closing oration. In addition to the five invocations listed in the rite, other saints may be added, such as the patrons of the children to be baptized and of the church or locality. [48, 85, 139]

As a conclusion to the general intercessions, this short litany manifests the belief of the Church that all members of the Church are united in the communion of saints and that those members who have already received their reward can intercede for those still on earth. The litany thus suggests the relationship between all the members of the Church and those about to be baptized.

The litany of the saints may accompany the procession to the baptismal font.

When there are large numbers to be baptized, the litany of saints may be omitted. [114]

Prayer of Exorcism Anointing Before Baptism and Laying on of Hands

The celebrant says one of the two prayers of exorcism given in the rite. Then he anoints the child on the breast with the oil of catechumens (saying the words provided) and lays his hand on the child in silence. [49-51, 86-88, 115]

When there are large numbers, the anointing is omitted and the imposition of the hands is made over all at the same time. [115]

The prayer of exorcism reminds the assembly that in Christ sin and death have been conquered. Chosen by Christ, we are now to lead a new life of grace.

The anointing with the oil of catechumens may be omitted by the celebrant when he judges this to be pastorally necessary or desirable. In such a case, a short prayer is prayed followed by the laying on of hands. [51]

A few words of explanation may be appropriate for either rite, since the significance of both symbols is not well understood by many people.

Procession (Optional)

If the liturgy of the word has been celebrated in a part of the church other than the baptistry, or the place where the temporary font is set up, there is a procession to the baptismal font.

The procession may be seen as a movement toward baptism made in faith following the proclamation of the word. What has been proclaimed in the word will now be celebrated in the sacrament.

The litany of the saints may accompany the procession to the font.

CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT

Introduction

The celebrant reminds the congregation of the significance of the rite to be celebrated using the words provided in the rite or speaking briefly in his own words. [53, 90, 117, 141]

The brief introductory remarks serve to emphasize the significance of the rite and to link what is about to take place with the liturgy of the word.

Blessing and Invocation over the Water

Outside the Easter season, the celebrant blesses fresh water for each occasion, using one of the three forms provided in the rite. [54, 91 118]

During the Easter season, the blessing of God is still proclaimed [119, 223-224] with variations as noted in the text. The faithful respond to each blessing as appropriate.

The blessing of God over the water serves a dual purpose: it reminds the faithful of the basic human symbolism of water as a source of death and life; and it also reminds them of all that God has done for his people throughout the ages. It is the action of God through this water and word which is effective. The format of the blessing, a prayer of thanks and praise to God for the wonderful things He has done for us (*berakah*) is similar to the basic structure of the preface of the eucharistic prayer. The second and third formula provide for the more active participation of the assembly in this prayer through acclamations and may be most effective when sung.

Renunciation Of Sin and Profession Of Faith

After a short instruction, the celebrant questions the parents and godparents concerning their rejection of Satan and sin. Two forms are provided. (56-7, 93-4, 120-1, 144-5]

The celebrant asks the parents and godparents to profess their faith, using a question format which employs wording very similar to the Apostles' Creed. The celebrant and the whole congregation then give their assent to this profession of faith. [58-9, 95-6, 122-3, 146-7]

During Mass, the Nicene Creed is omitted. [29.2c]

This rejection of sin by the parents and godparents is the first part of their public recommitment to the demands of baptism.

The three-fold profession of faith is the second part of this public recommitment. It is indicative of the whole character of this infant rite that these questions are directed to the parents and godparents who are accepting the responsibility for raising this child as a member of the church community. The whole assembly then affirms this profession of faith, which indicates both the responsibility of the whole community for each member and also the acceptance of this member into the faith community, which is the Church.

When baptism is celebrated within Mass the entire community participates in the renunciation of sin and profession of faith.

Baptism

The celebrant questions the parents and godparents as to their explicit intention that the children be baptized using the name of the individual child. He then baptizes each child by immersion or a triple pouring of water over the child using the words of the Trinitarian formula. [60, 97, 124, 148]

If the sacrament is administered by pouring, the mother or father should hold the child while the celebrant pours the water and recites the Trinitarian formula.

If baptism is by immersion, the parent lifts the child from the font. [60, 97, 124, 148]

When there are large numbers, other priests or deacons may assist in the baptism. [61]

Baptism by immersion is a clear sign of incorporation into the death and resurrection of Christ. Baptism by pouring of water emphasizes more strongly the theme of cleansing. Proper explanation can bring out more clearly the nature of baptism as a dying to sin and rising with Christ to new life. The threefold immersion or pouring along with the words of the baptism formula make clear that through baptism one is associated with the saving activity of the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. By baptism, the Christian is given a share in the life of the Trinity.

It may be desirable to have the water heated.

Anointing with Chrism

In the post-baptismal anointing, the presider prays a prayer expressing the significance of anointing with sacred chrism. He then anoints each child with chrism on the crown of the head. [62, 98, 125]

When there are large numbers, other priests or deacons may anoint some of the children. [62]

This post-baptismal anointing with chrism signifies the membership of the newly baptized in the royal, prophetic, and priestly people of the new covenant. The anointing with chrism will be repeated in the sacrament of Confirmation as the baptized are strengthened with the gifts of the Holy Spirit to witness more faithfully to Christ.

Clothing with White Garment

The child is clothed with the white garment as a symbol of the dignity of the baptized Christian. [63, 99, 126, 152]

The family or the community may provide the white garment for the child. Parents or godparents may assist in placing the garment on the child.

If the family has a special white baptismal gown, they may consider bringing the child in simple clothing and waiting until this part of the rite to clothe the child in the baptismal garment.

Candle

The celebrant holds the Easter candle while a member of each family lights the baptismal candle from it. Then the celebrant addresses the parents and godparents, explaining the significance of the light. [64, 100, 127, 153]

The baptismal candle may be lit by the minister from the Easter candle and handed to the parents or the godparents.

The lighting of the candle from the Easter candle, symbol of the risen Christ, suggests two aspects of the theme of illumination. One is that through baptism the Christian is enlightened by Christ so that he/she can see with the eyes of faith. The second is that the Christian must also be a light to all people and must spread the light of Christ throughout the world. The candle may be provided by the family or the community and decorated appropriately. The candle should be given to the family, so that it may be used in celebrations of the anniversary of the child's baptism.

Ephphetha or Prayer Over the Ears and Mouth

The celebrant touches the ears and mouth of each child while saying a prayer that they might be opened to hear and proclaim the word of God. [65, 101] The ephphetha can be omitted at the discretion of the celebrant. [65]

When there are a large number being baptized, the celebrant says the formula once, but does not touch the ears and mouth of any of the children. [66]

If baptism is celebrated within Mass, the Mass continues as usual with the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

If baptism is celebrated *outside Mass*, the rite continues as follows:

(Procession)

Unless the baptism was performed in the sanctuary, there is a procession to the altar of the church. The newly lighted baptismal candles are carried in the procession. [67, 102, 127, 153]

The significance of the ephphetha rite is given in the accompanying prayer: it is a sign of the opening of the ears of the child that he/she might hear the word of God and of his/her mouth that he/she might proclaim faith and praise the Lord.

The final processional to the altar indicates the connection between Baptism and Eucharist. Baptism is the first of the three sacraments of initiation; the eucharist is the culmination of initiation where the baptized join the whole Christian community in the sacrament of unity and love.

This procession might also be accompanied by a baptismal song. [225-245]

CONCLUSION OF THE RITE

During Mass this rite is shortened; only the blessings are used and they take the place of the usual blessing at the end of Mass. [29]

The Lord's Prayer

The celebrant instructs the congregation concerning the relation between Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist using the text provided or in his own words; then all recite the Lord's Prayer together. [68-9, 103-4, 128-9, 154-5]

Blessings

The celebrant blesses the mothers, who hold their children, the fathers, and then the entire assembly. Several forms are provided in the rite. [70, 247-249]

These blessings are a prayer for God's help for all those over whom they are said, that each may live out the implications of their baptismal commitment and assist the newly baptized children on their journey of faith.

Conclusion

A song might fittingly conclude the baptism. There is no provision for a final procession though the celebrant might wish to accompany the group to the entrance of the church, offering his personal congratulations. [71, 106, 131, 156]

If it is the local custom, the child may be taken to the shrine of the Blessed Virgin Mary at this time.