



Parent Pages

Preparing the environment of the Domestic Church*

* The term "Domestic Church" refers to the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Though recovered only recently, the term dates back to the first century AD. The Greek word *ecclesiola* referred to "little church." The early Church understood that the home.

The Gift of Baptism

Baptism is an immense gift. Young children who have already been baptized as infants need to become aware of this gift they have received as soon as possible. They need to be given the opportunity to contemplate and enjoy the gift already at work within them. And young children who come to our atrium who have not yet been baptized also need to know about the gift of Baptism. They too need to become aware of the great desire of the risen Christ to share his life and light with us in a most particular way through Baptism.

-Sofia Cavalletti, *The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey*, p 57

The gifts and signs of Baptism are introduced to the children in their first year of the Level One Atrium. The gifts and signs are actually presented over a series of three presentations. In the Level Two and Level Three Atrium, children look at the rite (ceremony) and prayers in depth. They also come to understand the relationship between Baptism and the other Sacraments, especially Reconciliation and Eucharist.

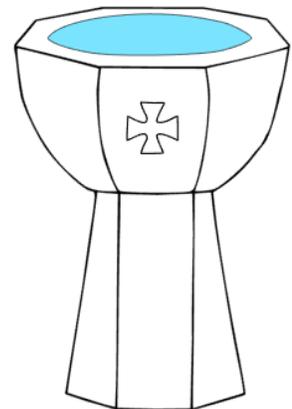
The Gifts and Signs of Baptism

Light and White Garment

At baptism, the child knows that the light that is present inside the heart shines on the outside in the white garment. The white garment is a sign of cleanliness and new life, it shows we are children of light. The image of Christ as Light has been prominent in Christian tradition, starting with the apostle Paul and the Church Fathers through to the present day. How did your baptism clothe you with Christ? How do you put on Christ every morning?

Water

Even the youngest child loves to play in water. It nourishes our plants and gardens. It is used to clean and bring new life. Water is one of the signs of our liturgy. In our sacraments, we use elements of everyday life, because we know that God is working through the elements of matter to assure our salvation. Talk about what water does for us? What are some of the ways we use water every day? Can life be sustained without water? What kind of life does this baptismal water give to us? How is water a meeting place in which we encounter God in our everyday world?



Word of God

The children know that the Bible is the Word of God. When we listen to the Word of God, the Lord is present. When we listen to his Word or read his Word, it brings light to our hearts. God continues to share more light

and life of the risen Christ with us when we spend time with his Word. His Word enlightens our mind to understand who God is.

Do your children know your favorite Bible story? Read it to them. Explain what it means to you and why it has been important in your life. This is valuable information for your children. They will enjoy it, even if they do not show it at the time.

Oils

Oils are used by athletes to strengthen them, it is used for healing, as it soothes and protects the skin. In the Bible, we read that oil is used to anoint kings. At Baptism, the Oil of Catechumen is used to both strengthen and heal us. The Sacred Chrism is a sign of the presence of Holy Spirit and anoints us for a special work in history of salvation. The Chrism oil has a beautifully sweet fragrance. What does this tell us about Baptism? Sofia Cavalletti writes, "Do we acquire a new beauty, a new sweetness like the beauty and sweetness of Christ? And does this new beauty and sweetness bless other people; does it make them happier to be near us?"

Sign of the Cross

The cross reminds us that we belong to Jesus. We make this sign when we pray, so that we may place our minds and our hearts upon God. It is the holiest of signs. At Baptism, the cross is signed as a blessing on the child, and on the family. A blessing that God's life may flow and make one holy.

Do you make this sign in your home as a family? Do you trace the cross on the forehead of your children before they go to bed? Do you find yourself making this sign during the day, does it offer you comfort and support in times of distress and anxiety?

At Home

Share with your younger children:

- Why you had him or her baptized?
- Who were the godparents/sponsors? Why did you choose them?
- What were your hopes and dreams for your child in his or her relationship with the Good Shepherd?

How would you finish these sentences, when speaking with your older child?

- When you were baptized, I promised God, the church, and you that I would...
- I want to continue to help you grow in your faith in God by...
- When it comes to your spiritual life, I want to help you to...
- Some of the strengths and qualities that God has given to you include...

Baptism Is a Beginning

CGSUSA has a wonderful resource for parents and grandparents that offers essays on the elements of baptism, religious capacities of the young child, praying with young children, moral formation in young children and much more. By making water work available to our children and exploring water's use in our church, we are initiating them into our Christian life by introducing them to one of the most potent signs in our liturgy.

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