



Becoming a Beloved Child of the Father

This is the second in a series of articles on the “Masterworks of God.” The seven sacraments of the Church continue the work of Christ that He carried out while here on earth, providing the power to cure the wounds of sin, healing both our soul and body and giving us His new life.

Baptism is a gift of God’s love and, therefore, is the greatest gift parents can give their child. In receiving this first sacrament, the person becomes an adopted and beloved child of the Father. By receiving the new life of God—the life of Grace—through the Church, the newly baptized will be empowered to live in relationship with God, both now and in eternity.

The sacrament of baptism includes outward visible signs that

signify inward invisible realities. Thus, we are called to understand not only what is seen but, more deeply, what is unseen—the supernatural realities of Jesus’ actions and the realities that He is accomplishing in this sacrament. When one can see and understand in this sacramental manner, participation in the sacrament is more fruitful and life-changing.

In the sacrament of baptism, we witness the following:

VISIBLE SIGN—Sign of the Cross
INVISIBLE REALITY—Belong to Jesus and Saved by His Cross

At the beginning of the baptism, the celebrant marks the child’s forehead with the sign of the cross. In order to understand this “signing,” there is an event from the Old Testament that provides insight.

This event points to the fulfillment of this sign—the reality of what was accomplished in the New Testament through Jesus’ death on the cross.

At the time of Moses, during the final plague, God passed through Egypt and struck down the firstborn of every household. Moses told the Jews to mark their doors with the blood of a lamb they had sacrificed—the Passover offering—and so God “passed over” their homes. The marking with the blood of the lamb was put on the two doorposts and the top of the door frame, as a prefigurement of the sign of the cross. This “sign” literally saved them from death.

The Church founded by Christ is the household of God that receives this child through the sacrament of baptism. The sign of the cross on the forehead of the child will bring about these realities:

- signifies the grace of redemption Christ won by His cross. (CCC #1235)
- marks the person with the imprint of Christ as a seal of ownership, who now belongs to Him.
- means the baptized can depend on Christ’s care and protection.

VISIBLE SIGN—Water
INVISIBLE REALITY—Cleansing, life-giving

Baptism is needed because every person is born with a fallen human nature and tainted by Original Sin. The use of water in baptism, literally, brings about the forgiveness and cleansing from sin. Just as in the natural world water cleanses you from dirt and stains, and children take baths, so, too, in the supernatural life, water signifies the washing away of the stain of Original Sin through the “bath of rebirth.” The word “signifies” means to make effective, to bring about this reality.

The water of baptism signifies death to the sinful self. Just as in the natural world, water can destroy—

as in the flood of Noah's time when sin was drowned—so, too, in the supernatural world, by passing through baptismal waters, the old sinful self is destroyed. "Baptism efficaciously signifies the descent into the tomb by the Christian who dies to sin with Christ in order to rise to new life." (CCC #628)

While too much water can be destructive, life is not possible without at least some life-giving water. So, too, in the supernatural world, Jesus offers "living water"—God the Holy Spirit—who brings about in the person a share in Divine Life. The baptized is spiritually born through "water and the Spirit." Just as the gestation of our first birth took place in water, hence, the font is likened to the "womb of the Church." The newly baptized enters into the life of the Holy Trinity through the reception of sanctifying grace, which was lost through the Original Sin. The child will now share in God's life, in union with Jesus.

The baptized person is a new creation, an adopted son or daughter of God. As His child, one can now call God "Father" and enter into a new relationship with this loving and personal God. However, even after baptism, certain consequences of sin remain in our wounded human nature: suffering, illness, death, weakness of character, as well as an inclination to sin. God has also taken care of our need to be cleansed after baptism through the sacrament of confession.

VISIBLE SIGN—Oil
INVISIBLE REALITY—The strength and power that come from Christ our Savior and membership in the Body of Christ

Another effect of baptism is incorporation into the Catholic Church, the Body of Christ. Before the washing with water, the person is anointed with the oil of catechumens and Satan is explicitly renounced. The person is also

anointed with sacred chrism after emerging from the font, which signifies the gift of the Holy Spirit to the newly baptized. This anointing incorporates the Christian into Christ. In becoming a member of the Church, the child enjoys special rights: to receive the sacraments, to be nourished with the Word of God and to be sustained by the other spiritual helps of the Church. Further, the baptized has certain responsibilities: to love and serve God by loving and serving others, especially those in need.

VISIBLE SIGN—White Garment
INVISIBLE REALITY—Spotless without stain

The child receives a white garment demonstrating the baptized has "put on Christ." The parents and godparents are called to help this child to remain united to Christ on their pilgrimage to heaven. The baptized person, now being conformed to Christ, receives an indelible spiritual mark (or character). This mark is the "sign of faith" and "the seal of eternal life" as the person cooperates with God's grace in living out daily Christian life. (CCC #1274) As the mark is permanent, baptism can only be received once.

VISIBLE SIGN—Lighted Candle
INVISIBLE REALITY—Walking with Christ, the Light of the World

The parents then receive a lighted candle, understood through Jesus' words: "I am the Light of the world. He who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (Jn 8:12) As our Savior, Jesus led us out of the darkness of sin and death by His Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension into heaven, referred to as His Paschal Mystery. The Easter candle—the Paschal candle—is an image of Christ. The candle, lit from the Easter candle, signifies the triumph of the light of Faith over the darkness of sin.

The child receives the supernatural gift of Faith from God, which produces "interior enlightenment," meaning that the Faith received pervades the soul and causes the veil of blindness to fall before the brightness of Christ. (Instruction on Infant Baptism, n. 18) Therefore, baptism is a cause of Faith. This Faith is in seed form in the child and needs to be fostered by the parents and the godparents in order to grow.

This gift of Faith, as well as hope and charity, are infused by God, making your child capable of acting as His child and of receiving eternal life. These supernatural gifts make it possible for your child to enter into a relationship with Jesus.

A prayer is prayed over the parents, asking God that they be the first and best teachers of their child in the ways of Faith, by bearing witness by what they say and do. The life of this new Christian needs to be protected and fostered in a practical and ongoing way. Parents are to teach the child to pray, have conversations about the Faith, make choices in light of Faith, and serve those in need. These parental responsibilities call for a deepening of their own Faith throughout their adult life.

The grace of Christ does not merely cover our sinful selves, it elevates and perfects us. The child—and all of the baptized—must cooperate with the power of this grace and pursue a life of Faith, hope and charity rooted in a personal relationship with Jesus.

Let us be truly grateful for the sacrament of baptism; this reality changes the entire meaning of life! What an amazing gift it is that we receive forgiveness of sins, become an adopted and beloved child of God and are welcomed as a member of the Church. May your family be richly blessed as you journey together on this great adventure—your journey to heaven—under the powerful grace and protection of the sacraments. †



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