

The Celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism at St. Margaret Mary Parish

Every child that comes into this world is a great gift from God. The St. Margaret Mary Parish community is grateful to have children baptized into our parish family, and assures families that they are being remembered in our prayers.



The Theological Meaning of Baptism

From the beginning of humanity, water is the **source of life** and fertility. During the Easter Vigil, as the priest blesses the water, he prays: *O God, whose Spirit in the first moments of the world's creation hovered over the waters, so that the very substance of water would even then take to itself the power to sanctify.* The Church has always seen **Noah's Ark**, which saved humanity from the flood, as an image of salvation through Baptism, since in her, *only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water (1 Peter 3:20).* Then the **crossing of the Red Sea**, that freed Israel from Egyptian slavery, declares a different kind of liberation which also takes place during Baptism. Ultimately, **the crossing of the Jordan** announces Baptism; after this event took place, Israel entered the Promised Land, as an image of everlasting life. *(Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church 253)*

All the Old Covenant prefigurations find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. At the beginning of his public life Jesus had himself baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan. On the cross, blood and water, signs of Baptism and the Eucharist, flowed from his pierced side. After his Resurrection he gave to his apostles this mission: "Go forth and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). (Compendium 254)

What is Baptism?

Baptism is an amazing gift from God, the foundation of the entire Christian life, and the gateway that gives one entrance into the other Sacraments. It is the first of the seven Sacraments in the Catholic Church, which takes away original sin, forgives every personal sin, acquits the punishment due to sin, grants supernatural life (sanctifying grace), and bestows the theological virtues (faith, hope, love) and the gifts of the Holy Spirit; it takes the adopted children of God and incorporates them into the great Christian family, also giving them a share in the priesthood of Christ. *(Compendium 263)*

Requirements for the Baptism of a Child

1. That the parents or at least one of them, or the person who lawfully holds their place, gives consent.
2. That there be a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion; if such a hope is truly lacking the Baptism is to be deferred... (*Code of Canon Law 868*).

How is the Ritual of Baptism Performed?

One is baptized through being immersed in water or by having water poured over the head, and pronouncing his or her name with the formula: *I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

Why do we receive the Sacrament of Baptism only once? We only receive Baptism once in our lives because it marks the soul with an indelible seal. Through this mark we have been made like Christ the Archpriest and incorporated into His Church. The sacramental attribute of the Baptism is so sacred that it cannot be destroyed even by mortal or serious sin; therefore, we can receive Baptism only once in our life.

Who Can Baptize?

The ordinary ministers of the sacrament are the bishop, priest, and deacon. In case of necessity (life-threatening) any person can baptize provided they have the intention of doing what the Church does, and they pour water on the head while saying the Trinitarian formula: *(Name), I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.* (*Compendium 260*)



Is Baptism Necessary for Salvation?

Receiving Baptism is something Jesus Himself directed us to do, saying: *Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:16).* Christ also said: *No one can enter the Kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the spirit (Jn 3:5).* Baptism is necessary for those who have heard the Gospel proclaimed and can ask for the sacrament. If someone knows very well that Baptism is established by Christ to give grace, then they must receive it or risk losing their salvation. (*Compendium 261*)

How do we understand Baptism by Blood? Martyrs of their faith in Christ who die without Baptism by water receive purification from their sins and internal rebirth, and through this they can attain salvation. Their martyrdom is a Baptism of blood in place of Baptism by water. Suffering for Christ and giving one's life for Him declares a deep faith and love. Through their passion and death martyrs become like Christ crucified and through Him they are cleansed and sanctified.

Many people are also saved through a Baptism of Desire. Catechumens and all people who, not knowing Christ and His Church, truly seek God and open themselves to the truth (under the influence of the grace of God) and try to live an honest life following the voice of their conscience, can be saved without Baptism.

At this point a certain question might come to mind: when a child dies without Baptism can this child be saved? The Church can only, in her continuous prayer before the throne of God, recommend them to the immeasurable Mercy of God. It is difficult to imagine that the loving God, who justifies the worst of sinners, would cast away from Himself children who have never offended Him. (*Compendium 262*)

What is the Meaning of the Name we Receive at Baptism?

Parents, sponsors and parish priests are to take care that a name is not given which is foreign to Christian sentiment (Canon 855). The name is important because God knows each of us by name, that is, in our uniqueness as persons. In Baptism a Christian receives his or her own name in the Church. It should preferably be the name of a saint who can offer



the baptized a model of sanctity and an assurance of his or her intercession before God (Compendium 264). If the first name is not a Christian name, it is common practice to choose a second name to reflect the Christian spirit. But let us remember that it is better for the child that the name be of a saint or someone declared Blessed by the Church, so that the saint can ensure the baptized spiritual care and be a true example of Christian life.

When Should Baptism be Celebrated?

Parents are obliged to take care that infants are baptized in the first few weeks; as soon as possible after the birth.... An infant in danger of death is to be baptized without delay (Canon 867).

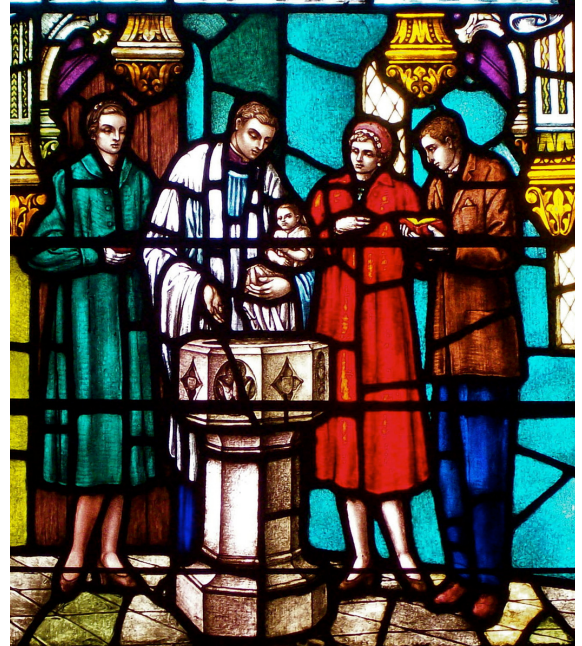
Why is it so important to baptize the baby? Every child that comes into this world is born with the original sin. The Sacrament of Baptism takes this away, making the baptized a Child of God and incorporating them into the great Christian family. The parents who do not make sure the child is baptized right after birth are depriving them of invaluable graces given to the Children of God.

In the first centuries of Christianity, it was not the custom to baptize infants. It took a couple of years to prepare adult candidates. That time of preparation to receive the sacrament was called the Catechumenate. Ultimately the Church began the custom of baptizing infants. However, the practice of baptizing adults, who for one reason or another did not receive the sacrament, still remains. Adult candidates who are instructed in the truths of the faith and their Christian obligations, and who finish their formation as a Catechumen, receive the three sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist, on Holy Saturday.

The Role of Godparents

The Code of Canon Law states: *Parents...even before the child is born are to go to the pastor to request the sacrament for their child and to be prepared properly for it (867).*

St. Margaret Mary Parish requires the parents of the child to fill out a baptism application online or to pick up an application and return it to the Parish office. Unfortunately, it very often happens that parents pick the Godparents and then find out that they do not fulfill the requirements of the Church for this very important and honourable role.



They mistakenly claim that:

- a. The role of Godparents is reserved for members of family; especially siblings.
- b. Anyone can take on this role to be Godparents; it is not relevant whether that person practices the faith or not.
- c. People of a different faith can be Godparents.

Let us look at the explanation and reasons why points a. and b. are incorrect. With all baptized children and adults after Baptism their faith should grow and increase. This is why during the Holy Saturday Vigil, the Church renews her baptismal promises. Baptism is the source of new life in Christ; in order for the grace of Baptism to develop the parents need to help. This is what the Godparents are for, who themselves believe deeply and are ready and able to give help to the child or the adult on their Christian journey. The Code of Canon Law states: *(Godparents should) help the baptized person to lead a Christian life in keeping with Baptism and to fulfill faithfully the obligations inherent in it (872).*

To be chosen as a Godparent is an exceptional distinction. No one else but you have been chosen Godmother/Godfather and have been given a special responsibility in the Christian upbringing of the child. This privilege allows parents to build a long-lasting relationship between the Godparents and the baptized child.

There are many ways that Godparents can nurture this connection with the baptized child, being for the child a particular guide in their maturation in the Catholic faith. A few examples:

- Pray often for the intention of the child.
- Celebrate the anniversary of the child's Baptism by attending Sunday Mass together.
- Take part in the Sacramental life of the child, especially when the child receives First Communion and Confirmation.
- Accompany the child as they grow and answer any rising questions or doubts on the subject of faith.
- Encourage the child to live their life according to their faith, offering them the Bible, books, religious films, the rosary, and so on.
- Most importantly, the Godparents need to be an example of Christian living for their Godchild through the practice of daily prayer, practicing virtues, participation in the Sunday Eucharist and other feast days, and participating in the life of the parish.



Let us go back to considering our next point, c.—an important issue. More and more Catholics these days, after receiving the proper dispensation, are marrying a spouse from a different religion. A situation like this has an enormous effect on the religious life and the religious practice of the couple and their children; this especially concerns the celebration of Baptism. In this specific situation—can the Godparents be people of another faith?—remains a valid question.

In this matter Canon Law is very precise and says: *A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community is not to participate except together with a Catholic sponsor and only as a witness of the Baptism (874).*

In other words, the Godmother or Godfather must always be Catholic. People of other faiths cannot be Godparents; they can only be a witness of the Baptism and under the condition that one of the Godparents will always remain Catholic.

In the situation where the witness of the Baptism is chosen from another faith, and the chosen Catholic Godparent does not attend a Catholic Church but rather worships in the faith community of their spouse, they are therefore not allowed to be a Godparent in the Catholic Church. Why? Because they do not practice the Catholic faith. The one exception to this rule is someone chosen from the Orthodox Church. Due to the fact that the Catholic Church is in communion with the Orthodox Church, an Orthodox member is able to be a Godparent alongside the Catholic Godparent.

If there are two Godparents, one is **male** and the other **female**.

Sunday (the Day of the Lord) — Celebration of Baptism

Although Baptism can be celebrated on any day, it is recommended that it be celebrated ordinarily on Sunday or if possible at the Easter Vigil (Canon 856).

At St Margaret Mary, the Sacrament of Baptism is celebrated on Saturdays at 10:00 am and



on Sundays, right after the finishing of the noonday Mass. Because the Liturgy of Baptism is celebrated in our Church without the Mass, parents and Godparents, as well as their invited guests, are expected to participate in the Sunday Eucharist, to the extent they are able. Parents are encouraged to send an invitation to guests to participate in Mass in our church prior to the Baptism. This could fittingly be included in invitations sent to guests.

Dear Parents!

Calling upon this great joy that your child will be joined to the great Christian family and will become a new member of St. Margaret Mary Parish in Hamilton, we want to congratulate your reception of God's gift of life in the person of this little baby and we want to assure you of our constant prayers for your whole family. We hope this letter will help you to properly prepare for the celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism.

Fr. Adam Wroblewicz, C.R.



ST. MARGARET MARY
Roman Catholic Church