

My Dear people of God,

Today we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord which also brings to a close the Christmas season. The baptism of Jesus inaugurates His ministry as the anointed one. This celebration reminds us of our own baptism and the importance of that Sacrament. I am devoting this week's column to describe the important elements of the Rite of Baptism and what they signify. I hope that this will not only help us appreciate our own baptismal commitment, but also the rite of Baptism.

There is a Latin axiom "*Lex orandi, lex credendi*" which means 'how the church prays witnesses what she believes.' How we pray or how we do things (in prayer) shows what we believe. Delving into the rite of baptism will hopefully help us appreciate this Sacrament. There are three distinct phases in the Rite of Baptism (Preparatory, Baptism, and Post-Baptism) each with its constituent parts.

PREPARATORY

Reception of Children: The rite begins with the reception of the Children in which the parents and Godparents present them for baptism. This is important because these children have not attained the age of reason and as such, they are being baptized on the basis of the faith of their parents and Godparents. To that end, the parents are asked questions relating to their intentions (*what do you want from the Church, what names do you give the children*) and they are asked whether they are ready to bring the children up in the practice of the faith. The Godparents are asked to confirm their readiness to help the parents in doing this noble task. To conclude the Reception of the Children for Baptism, they are traced with the sign of the cross by the celebrant, as well as the parents and Godparents in so doing, claiming them for Christ.

Celebration of God's Word: Here readings related to baptism are taken from Sacred Scripture upon which a homily will be given to expound on them. Soon after the homily, intercessions will be made especially for the children to be baptized and concludes with the invocation of the saints.

Prayer of Exorcism and Anointing: This prayer is to drive away evil spirits and to beseech God to be their protector henceforth. The prayer is accompanied by the anointing in the chest with the oil of Catechumens and the laying on of hands. These are very important and ancient actions that signify transmission of power.

BAPTISM

Baptism: This is the main and most important part of the rite. It begins with a blessing of the water to be used. This recalls the wonders God has done through water and invokes the Spirit upon it so that it will be effective (*if the water is already blessed, this is skipped*). The parents and Godparents (and all present) are then reminded of the obligation that they are undertaking in bringing the children for Baptism and invited to renew their baptismal promises, to reject Satan/sin and profess faith in Jesus Christ. This is very important because as mentioned before, this is what they will and should teach to the children. It is only right and fitting that they re-affirm their own baptismal commitment.

The children are then brought forth for the actual water ritual of baptism. This is done by immersion in water or by pouring water three times accompanied by the words "*<names> I baptize you in the name of the Father* (first time) *and of the Son* (second time) *and of the Holy Spirit*

(third time).” This is the summit of the rite, because in the water the children are purified from sin and born a new in the spirit. **They are made a new creation, *they are born again!***

POST BAPTISM

Anointing: The baptized children are then anointed with the holy oil of Chrism thus welcoming them into the body of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King. This signifies a welcome and incorporation into the Body of Christ.

Clothing with a white garment: The children are presented with a white garment signifying their new and pure dignity in Christ. With their parents and family they are charged with the responsibility of keeping it unstained.

Lighted Candle: The parents and God parents are presented with a candle lighted from Paschal Candle (*which represents the risen Christ*) signifying that the children have been enlightened by Christ and are therefore to live as such (*children of the light*). They are therefore to “keep it burning until they meet the Lord.”

Prayer over ears and mouth: The ears and mouths of the children are touched (or traced with the cross) accompanied by a prayer invoking the Lord to touch them so that they may receive/hear (ears) and proclaim (mouth) the faith.

Thanks and God bless,

Fr Simon Peter