

# Baptism of Children

Mass Plus

Series on Sacraments 3

St. Veronica Church

E. Besl

## 1. New Testament

- From Greek “baptizo” – to immerse, dip, plunge
- Theology: joined to Christ, die & rise with Christ, initiation into church, into Body of Christ, adopted child of God, gift of Holy Spirit, offer of salvation
- Not clear if young children are baptized in NT. But baptism of “households” does not exclude children.

## 2. Early Christianity

- Baptism of young children accepted as common practice by 200 C.E.
- Children baptized for same reasons as adults: see New Testament theology above
- Infants and young children are included with adults in steps and stages of catechumenate rites
- Infants and young children are baptized, confirmed, and given communion, at Easter Vigil
- An ancient document: “First baptize the children. Let those who can, speak for themselves. But those unable to speak for themselves, let their parents or someone from their family speak for them.”  
*Apostolic Tradition* (3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c.), n21

## 3. Infant Baptism Dominates & Confirmation Separates From Baptism

- Doctrine of original sin c. 400. Result: must baptize children as soon as possible after birth
- Loss: no time for catechumenate steps; can’t wait for Easter; not involve community
- Rich biblical theology of baptism reduced to one thing: removes original sin
- Frequent baptisms. Bishop (pastor of a city) can no longer be present at every baptism. So postpone bishop’s part – anoint forehead with chrism (confirmation) – till later.
- Middle Ages: no longer offer communion for young children

## 4. Middle Ages up to Vatican Council II

- In ancient church, young children were treated the same as adults in the rites for baptism. Questions were addressed to candidate for baptism.
  - Since the children could not say their part, godparents said the child's line and answered for the child.
  - “Do you reject sin?” “Do you believe in God ...?” asked of child.  
Godparents: I do.
  - For almost 2000 years, these questions were *addressed to the child*, and the godparents answered speaking in place of the child, *as if it were the child speaking*.
- Another way young children were treated the same as adults in the rites for baptism:
  - Did adults have godparents? Yes, to guide them while they were catechumens, and to help them after baptism to be faithful. So did children and infants.
  - Was there a role for an adult's parents? No. So, no role for a child's parents -- same as adults.
  - Even when infant baptism became so popular, the rite was not changed, and there continued to be no role for parents. The godparents’ role continued.
- Pedestal fonts, with elaborate covers, instead of shallow pools. Could use pedestal fonts for immersion. Eventually, just pour a little water over child’s head.



## 5. Vatican Council II: Two Goals for Revision of Infant Baptism

1. "The rite for the baptism of infants is to be revised, and it should be adapted to the circumstance that those to be baptized are, in fact, infants.
2. "The roles of parents and godparents, and also their duties, should be brought out more clearly in the rite itself." Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (1963) n. 67

## 6. Goal #1 Adapt the Rite for Actual Babies

- 1969 First time in liturgy's history, rite specifically for infants
- Reflects actual situation of young children--can't answer questions
- No longer asks infants or toddlers questions about rejecting sin and believing in God
- These questions remain in the rite, but are now addressed to parents and godparents
- Parents and godparents renew their own baptism

## 7. Goal #2 Clarify Roles of Parents and Godparents

- 1969 Rite changed practice of 2000 years – for first time includes a role for parents
- Parents are most important people in child's life; raise the child, pass on their faith & values to child
- New rite: primary role belongs to the parents; godparents' role is to help the parents
- Parents promise to raise child in the practice of the faith, godparents help.

*"Then the celebrant addresses the parents:*  
"You are undertaking the responsibility of raising them in the faith, so that... they may love the Lord and their neighbor as Christ has taught us.

Do you understand this responsibility?

*"Then turning to the godparents, the celebrant asks:*

"Are you ready to help the parents of these children in their duty?" OBC 39-40

[Just before baptism] *"The celebrant instructs the parents and godparents:*

"For your part, you must strive to bring them up in the faith.... If your faith makes you ready to accept this responsibility, then, mindful of your own Baptism, renounce sin and profess faith in Christ Jesus, the faith of the Church, in which children are baptized." OBC 56

## 8. Introduction to Order of Baptism of Children (1969, 2020)

- Baptism of young children is not about their personal faith, but the faith of the church. Under 7 yrs. OBC 1-2
- After baptism, children should "be formed in the faith in which they have been baptized ... so that ultimately they may be able to ratify the faith in which they have been baptized." OBC 3
- "A child, both before and after the celebration of the sacrament, has the right to the love and help of the community." "We offer you our support in raising your children in the practice of the faith." OBC 4, 36
- No longer as soon as possible. Now "during the first weeks after the birth of the child." OBC 8.3
- Easter Vigil, or Sunday – shows "paschal character of baptism." May be in Mass "so that the whole community may take part" and "connection between baptism and Eucharist may stand out clearly." OBC 9

## 9. The Ritual for Order of Baptism of Children, outside Mass

- Processional liturgy. Ritual moves to different places in the church. All sing psalms as process.
  - Door – shows entry into church. Receiving the Children (Q & A, sign forehead with cross)
  - Main body of church – Liturgy of the Word: Readings & homily, Prayer of Faithful, Litany of Saints, Anoint w Oil of Catechumens
  - Font – Celebration of Baptism: Blessing of Water, Profession of Faith, Baptism, Anoint w chrism, White Garment, Lighted Candle, Ephphatha
  - Altar – Conclusion: Our Father (looks forward to children completing initiation with Eucharist), Blessing and Dismissal
- New English translation 2020, similar to 2011 changes in Mass to adhere more closely to Latin.