

TO BAPTIZE -- A PARENT'S DECISION

There is something beautiful about a beginning. Even before a baby is born, the whole family is at work preparing. There must be a crib and clothing. If there are older children in the family, they too must be prepared for the arrival of their new brother or sister. There is a name to be chosen and serious consideration of new routines. You want to be sure that everything is ready for the new life that will come to your family.

You realize the responsibility you have of raising your child. This infant will be totally dependent upon you for food, for language, for early education. The child will learn and grow by your example. The responsibility is great, but you accept it in love: the great act of love for your child.

You will be the source of the child's notions of right and wrong, of how it feels to be loved and to love. "Oh, how peaceful!" you have heard said of a tiny baby. And it's true: innocent and peaceful, still untouched by a world not always so innocent and peaceful. You realize that children will be affected for better or worse by the world into which they are born. And you wish you could somehow spare your child from tension, greed and hatred that are part of the world.

At baptism, with the support of godparents and of the whole church, your child enters a community of people living to overcome the greed and hatred that are part of our humanity. This community lives its life set against our sinful directions, against "original sin" itself. At the celebration of baptism, you pledge yourselves to rearing this child in a way of Christ and against the sinful inclinations of humanity.

The decision to have your baby baptized must come only after serious reflection. Why? Because baptism does not end once the liturgy is over. Nor is baptism something which pertains to the child alone: you are involved.

Bringing your child to the baptismal font expresses your commitment to raise the child in the Christian faith. This faith needs to be awakened, strengthened and developed as the child matures. To present your child for baptism is to accept responsibility for the growth of that faith expressed when the Christian church baptizes.

Parents who ask that their child be baptized into Christ have the most significant part to play in the passing on of the Christian life to their offspring. It is through them that the child will learn to be beyond the family circle and become involved in the larger community in which he/she lives. Through the parents, the child will acquire an awareness of being a living and active member of the church.

Christian parents do not force their faith upon a child but lovingly profess their own belief in one Lord. Parents should baptize their child not because it is the custom, but because they sincerely desire the Christian life for the child. Parents who value their own faith and baptism will want to share the life of Christ they have inherited. Later, the child's faith will be based on what he/she has learned and experienced in the home and community from the very first days of life.

Because the responsibility of Christian parents is such a serious one, and often difficult, it is very understandable that they should invite family and friends to assist in the responsibility of raising a child in the Christian life. It is the godparents who most explicitly assume the responsibility with the parents and will be ready to help the parents raise their child to a knowledge of the Lord.

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