

BAPTISM

Introduction:

The first of the sacraments, baptism is birth into divine life, the gateway to the other sacraments (Janua sacramentorum), and it is baptism that makes one a Christian. The word comes from the Greek, to immerse in water. Baptism establishes a first step in a parallel between natural life and supernatural life.

I. THE SENSITIVE SIGN

Because baptism, in order to give supernatural life, must wash away all sin (and in particular original sin), its rite was intended by Our Lord as an ablution, an act of purification and cleansing.

❖ Remote matter: Water

Any water that is unaltered or uncorrupted. In general, the valid matter of a sacrament is that which is understood as such according to common judgement. Example: sea water.

❖ Proximate matter: the ablution

The use of the distant substance is specified: to purify, wash, clean. The water must therefore flow over the body.

There were three historical modes:

- **By immersion:** Completely submerging the body in water (almost universal until the XIIth century and still practiced in the East).
- **By sprinkling:** By throwing water over the body. Never used nowadays. Except in cases of extreme necessity (see Acts 2:41). Saint Francis Xavier: 700,000 baptisms.
- **Par infusion:** The current practice that involves pouring water three times over the body (usually the head, but not on the hair).

N.B.: The same person must pour the water and recite the formula, otherwise the ritual will be invalid.

❖ The form:

It indicates the minister (I), the person being baptized (you), the sacramental action (baptize) and the invocation of the Three Divine Persons in whose omnipotence this unique regeneration is accomplished. *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”* (Mat. 28:19). All of these elements are necessary for validity.

N.B.: The minister adds the first names and no one responds with “Amen”, because it is the reception of the sacrament itself that constitutes an act of faith.

II. EFFECTS OF BAPTISM

- **It erases original sin** (and personal sins as needed). As it is a birth, a beginning, it erases all the punishment due for these sins (which penance only does in part).
- **It gives sanctifying grace**, the principle of the new life in Christ Jesus.
- **It gives the indelible character of the Son of God**, which is a power (passive) to receive all other gifts of God, especially the other sacraments.
- **It brings the person into the Catholic Church** (being the visible admission into the society of the members of Jesus Christ).

Note: This order is didactic. The actual and logical order is different: character comes first (1) (and is always given in a valid baptism). From it flows sanctifying grace (2) because a Son of God is in friendship with his Father. And so, sin is forgiven (3) since it is incompatible with sanctifying grace (like water and fire). Incorporation into the Church (4) followed immediately from the character, as did sanctifying grace. This explains why (1) and (4) are always given and why (2) and (3) can be revived in a valid but ineffective baptism.

III. NECESSITY OF BAPTISM

For all, baptism is necessary, a means and a precept, and no one can be saved without having received it. “*Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.*” (John 3:5). “*Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved. Whoever does not believe will be condemned.*” (Mark 16:16).

Faith is therefore always necessary for salvation. But if someone, through no fault of their own (e.g. invincible ignorance of baptism), could not receive this sacrament, they could obtain its effects in the following two exceptional cases:

IV. BAPTISM OF THE BLOOD AND BAPTISM OF DESIRE

These are not sacraments and therefore do not confer character or bring one into the Church. But the other two effects of baptism (sanctifying grace and remission of sins) can be obtained without the sacrament through an act of perfect charity (those who love God above all else are no longer in sin and have received the principle of this love: sanctifying grace).

- Whether he gave his life for Jesus Christ, which is the supreme act of love: “*There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends*” (John 15:13; cf. Virtue of Strength).
- Or it produces an act of perfect charity that has the same effect. Baptism of desire is therefore not the desire for baptism but necessarily includes it.

V. THE SUBJECT OF BAPTISM

Any man who has not yet been baptized and who intends (if he is an adult) to receive it: this is for validity.

For lawfulness, the following is required:

- **Faith:**
 - For children: the Church provides it, like a mother.
 - For adults:
 - Contrition or at least attrition (*but without confession*)
 - The right intention to lead a Christian life (*with the intent it implies*).

VI. THE ORDINARY MINISTER OF BAPTISM IS THE PRIEST (or the delegated deacon)

The extraordinary minister is any man, even an infidel, in cases of danger of death or extreme necessity. It is sufficient to have the intention of doing what the Church wants (even if one does not have faith).

(Infants should not be baptized against their parents' wishes, in secret. It is a serious offence as procreation and education are linked; they are the same natural duty. There is a risk of sacrilege as they afterwards become in fact apostates, and the Church is not being taught. Guardians may baptize, in the case of separated or unmarried parents (the one who has custody decides because he has primary custody). When there is a danger of death: as in the case of this Jewish child baptized by a good person.)

VII. GODPARENTS ARE PARENTS IN FAITH (since baptism is a second birth)

They play a very important role in the case of impairment of the parents.

We need at least:

- **A godfather for men or a godmother for women**
- **For the sponsorship to be valid:** The godparent must have the faith, the intention to become godparent, to be Catholic (without heresy or excommunication), not be the biological parent, be designated by the parents or the baptized person himself and physically touch his godchild during the administration.
- **For lawfulness:** The godparent must be 14 years of age, educated in the religion, not a novice himself, in good standing (not in a state of sin) and not in the holy orders.

Please note: Sponsorship is an impediment to marriage.