

Baptism

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." ~ Matthew 28:18-20

JESUS COMMANDED THE ELEVEN (Judas was dead) to baptize all the nations "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

This baptismal formula given to the apostles and passed on by them to their successors continues to be used today while water is either poured over the head of the candidate or the candidate is entirely immersed in water. Ordinarily, the bishop, priest, or deacon baptizes. When these are not available, a catechist or other suitable person can be deputed by the local bishop to confer Baptism. In the case of an emergency, any person can validly baptize provided that they have both the intention of doing what the Church intends and that they pour water while saying the baptismal formula. Only those who have not yet been baptized can be baptized, because Baptism cannot be repeated.

Necessity of Baptism

Although God has not made known to us any means other than Baptism for salvation, this does not mean that God himself is restricted to Baptism. In his great mercy, God does save by other means, such as through the *Baptism of martyrdom* and the *Baptism of desire*.

Baptism of martyrdom refers to the salvation granted to those

who suffer death for the sake of the faith. Their faith is so sure that they willingly give all to Christ, even their lives. Thus, just as in Baptism one dies and is reborn, they, too, die and then are reborn into eternal life.

"Through this union with Christ in Baptism, we receive both the forgiveness of sins and new birth through the Holy Spirit."



Baptism of Christ, 6th century ivory panel from northern Italy

Baptism of desire refers to the salvation granted to those who die while they are still catechumens, or those who do not know Jesus, "but seek[s] the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it." (CCC 1260) Catechumens who die before they are baptized can be saved based on the presumption of their desire to receive the sacrament, to repent of their sins, and to live a life of charity.

Baptism of martyrdom and Baptism of desire show the necessity of both faith and Baptism for the forgiveness of sins which Jesus established when he commissioned the apostles: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk 16:16).

The salvation of others is implied by the fact that Christ "died ... once for all" (Rom 6:10; see also 2 Cor 5:15; Heb 10:10), and so every person must have some sort of opportunity to receive Jesus' gift of salvation. The salvation of children is supported by Jesus' words affirming that those who are like children are the greatest in the Kingdom (see Mt 18:1-5; Mk

9:33-37; Lk 9:46-48). The salvation of those who do not know Jesus is further supported by the fact that these people who make sincere efforts to seek truth and to do the will of God to the best of their understanding would have desired Baptism if they had known of its necessity.



An adult Baptism during the Easter Vigil Mass

“The baptized are called to witness to the faith they have received and to participate in the Church’s missionary and apostolic work.”

Grace of Baptism

In Baptism, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are *“all baptized into one body,”* the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). Through this union with Christ in Baptism, we receive both the forgiveness of sins and new birth through the Holy Spirit. These two principal effects accomplished by the grace of this sacrament have several important aspects.

The first principal effect includes not only the forgiveness of personal sins but also the washing away of original sin inherited from Adam and Eve. Baptism also erases all punishment due to sin. Furthermore, the grace received through Baptism is a tremendous aid in the struggle against sin. This assistance against sin is necessary because Baptism does not erase the temporal consequences of sin such as suffering, illness, and death, nor does Baptism erase our human inclination to sin.

The second principal effect, new birth in the Holy Spirit, refers to rebirth as adopted children of God (see Gal 4:5-7). This divine adoption is much more than our common notion of adoption. Through Baptism, one truly becomes a child of God, a partaker of the divine nature (see 2 Pt 1:4), a member of Christ (see 1 Cor 6:15), and a fellow heir with Christ (see Rom 8:17). The baptized person is really made a member of the Trinity-family and truly has God as Father. On earth, this family of God is the Church.

By Baptism, we also are made brothers and sisters to one another. By this rebirth, one becomes a *“new creation”* (2 Cor 5:17), with the rights, responsibilities, and dignity that belong to all who are Trinity-family members (every baptized person). Becom-

ing a member of Christ also means sharing in his eternal high priesthood

(see Heb 4:14-16). This participation is referred to as *the common priesthood of all believers* and should not be confused with the *ordained priesthood* of bishops, priests, and deacons who govern, preach, and sanctify the Church in the person of Christ. Rather as members of the common priesthood, the baptized are called to witness to the faith they have received and to participate in the Church’s missionary and apostolic work.

In Baptism one receives sanctifying grace. Grace is nothing other than God’s own divine life given to each person. In Baptism, this grace includes the theological virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (see Is 11:2). The theological virtues — faith, hope, and love — are infused into the soul by God at Baptism. They give the baptized the capacity to live as children of God. They also serve as the source for all the other virtues that are acquired by human effort with God’s help.

Although sin may obscure the fruits of Baptism, the effects of Baptism can never be erased from one’s soul. In Baptism, one receives an *indelible spiritual mark* (character). God will not abandon or forsake his own (see Is 49:14-15; Heb 13:5). Once made a child of God, one is a child of God for all eternity. For this reason, Baptism is never repeated.

(CCC 537, 977-978, 1213-1274, 1533, 2813)