

*Seven Sacraments
Our Encounter with Christ*

Baptism: The Gateway to All the Sacraments

Baptism is the gateway to all the sacraments. Only those who have been baptized into Christ can receive the other sacraments. Only those who have been baptized into Christ can claim the name “Christian”.

John the Baptist called people to repentance, and he baptized them in order to prepare them for the coming of Christ. Before he began his ministry, Jesus submitted to John’s baptism as a sign of his solidarity with humanity. It was at the moment of Jesus’ baptism that God identified Jesus as his beloved Son. But the baptism of John was merely a preparatory rite; it was not the Christian baptism we celebrate today.

Christian baptism is *baptism into the body of Christ*. It is the way we identify ourselves with the central mystery of our faith: the death and resurrection of Christ. St. Paul tells us this over and over again in his letters. In Romans 6, for example, he reminds us that when we were baptized into Christ we were baptized into his death so that we could walk in “newness of life”.

Baptism, then, is the way we are associated with Christ, who is the New Adam, so that we can enter into the “newness of life” that is life in the Holy Spirit. In baptism we are intimately associated with Christ’s death so that Sin no longer has ultimate power over our lives. In baptism we are associated with Christ’s resurrection so that we are raised up with Christ into “newness of life” now and resurrection life later.

Baptism frees us from the power of Original Sin that Adam and Eve brought into the world by transgressing God’s commandments. Those who are baptized now belong to the new Adam, who is Jesus Christ. Freed from the power of Original Sin, we are now free to serve God in loving obedience as did Christ.

It is through baptism that we become a member of the Church, which is the Body of Christ. At baptism we enter the community of the faithful who confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

In the early church, baptism was normally administered to adults after a period of catechesis similar to our RCIA program. Thus those who were baptized made a conscious decision of faith in and for Christ. As time went on, the church began to baptize infants as well as adults. While infant baptism is and remains an outstanding witness to God’s grace and mercy, one of its side effects is that most of us have no memory of what was the most important sacramental moment in our life.

But it is never too late to renew the grace of our baptism. The fact remains that we have been baptized and conformed to Christ. We are a new creation in Christ, and the grace of

baptism is always present to assist us in our need. Renew the grace of your baptism by calling upon the powerful gift of the Spirit that was given you, a gift that renewed and transformed you forever.

Next week, I will consider confirmation the sacrament by which we are sealed with the gift of God's Spirit so that we can be witnesses Christ's death and resurrection to the world.

Father Matera