

Baptism

(Read the Opening Prayer and Scripture out loud.)

Opening Prayer

Loving God, complete the work you began in baptism and make the gifts of your Holy Spirit active in the hearts of your people. Make us ready to live the gospel and eager to do your work in this world. May we never be ashamed to proclaim to the entire world our love of Christ crucified, living, and reigning forever. Amen.

Scripture

“Are you not aware that we, who were baptized into Christ Jesus, were baptized into His death? Through baptism into His death we were buried with Him, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life.” *(Romans 6:3)*

(Take time for silent reflection, then read the Introduction out loud.)

Introduction

Baptism, the first of the sacraments of initiation, signifies our immersion in the Christian life and marks our spiritual rebirth in the Church. This program asks us to consider how we are living out our baptismal promises.

(Introduce a speaker or the facilitator can read the following paragraphs with pauses in between.)

Documentary Tradition

From Pentecost onward baptism has been an essential part of the Christian movement. As soon as Christianity began to thrive and communities came into being through faith in the resurrection of Jesus, there arose a need to introduce new members in to this community. Throughout the New Testament the ritual celebration publicly expressed an acceptance of Jesus as Lord. Before long this initiation ceremony shifted its emphasis from entering a community to removing sin. With the restoration the Rite of Christian Initiation there is a restored balance in our understanding that embraces both cleansing and community.

“The people of God, as represented by the local Church, should understand and show by their concern that the initiation of adults is the responsibility of all the baptized. Therefore the community must always be fully prepared in the pursuit of its apostolic vocation to give help to those who are searching for Christ. In the various circumstances of daily life, even as in the apostolate, all the followers of Christ have the obligation of spreading the faith according to their abilities.” *(Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, #9)*

The reality is that through baptism we come to Christ, washed clean of our sins and embracing the community’s vision of human life, purpose, and identity. This happens only through a process of conversion that removes the obstacles from our hearts so we see the truth that God reveals to us through Jesus.

If we look at baptism from God’s eye view, we sense an overwhelming gift. We are made new and welcomed all at once. How we live as a community of believers and individually is an expression of the promises we made at our baptism. This way of living makes Jesus real to others and visible in the world.

“Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people is their right and duty by reason of their baptism. In the restoration and promotion of the sacred liturgy, this full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else; for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit.” (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy [Vatican III, # 14]*)

(The facilitator can read the Discussion Questions out loud for general or small group discussion.)

Discussion Questions

1. What is your understanding and experience of the quote: “We were baptized into Christ’s death.” Hear the words addressed to you as an individual and the Church as a whole.
2. Baptism gives us the right and duty to participate in the liturgy, and from that participation we are to derive “the true Christian spirit.” Do you derive the Christian spirit from your participation in the mass and your prayer life? What do you see as the relationship between liturgy and the rest of life?
3. The Church has restored the practice of adult baptism, preceded by serious formation in the Christian life. How would your understanding of baptism and your vocation be different if you were baptized as an adult? Are there situations where you are called to help adults searching for Christ?

Closing Reflection

Whether we were baptized as infants or made the decision to be baptized as an adult, we live each and every day within the covenant relationship we proclaimed at that time. Our continual awareness of this relationship with God and the Church and our attentiveness to the fulfillment of what it means to be Christian keeps us moving ever closer to Christ. With ever-deepening belief we can make a profound difference in the world based, on the Gospel values and our response, hour by hour, day by day.