

Catholic Update *guide to* Baptism



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Series Editor



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RESCRIPT

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About This Series

The Catholic Update guides take the best material from our best-selling newsletters and videos to bring you up-to-the-minute resources for your faith. Topically arranged for these books, the words you'll find in these pages are the same clear, concise, authoritative information you've come to expect from the nation's most trusted faith formation series. Plus, we've designed this series with a practical focus—giving the “what,” “why,” and “how to” for the people in the pews.

The series takes the topics most relevant to parish life—for example, the Mass, sacraments, Scripture, the liturgical year—and draws them out in a fresh and straightforward way. The books can be read by individuals or used in a study group. They are an invaluable resource for sacramental preparation, RCIA

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participants, faith formation, and liturgical ministry training, and are a great tool for everyday Catholics who want to brush up on the basics.

The content for the series comes from noted authors such as Thomas Richstatter, O.F.M., Lawrence Mick, Leonard Foley, O.F.M., Carol Luebering, William H. Shannon, and others. Their theology and approach is grounded in Catholic practice and tradition, while mindful of current Church practice and teaching. We blend each author's style and approach into a voice that is clear, unified, and eminently readable.

Enrich your knowledge and practice of the Catholic faith with the helpful topics in the Catholic Update Guide series.

Mary Carol Kendzia

Series Editor



Introduction

Baptism is the first of the three sacraments of initiation. Theologian Karl Rahner described it as “the sacramental entrance into the Church and thus into the fullness of Christian life.” Its importance is highlighted in Jesus’ parting words to his disciples, “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” (see Matthew 28:18).

Using the insights and experiences of several faith-filled people, and relying on the sacramental theology of the Church, we will review in this guide the what, why, and how of the sacrament of Baptism. The parents and godparents of a child who is to be baptized need to refresh themselves on the consequences and responsibilities that accompany conferral of this sacrament on their child. Those who are entering the Church as catechumens

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(normally through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, RCIA) should have a solid understanding of the blessings and the promises this sacrament entails.

Pope John XXIII underscored the radical nature of Baptism when he responded to the question, “Your Holiness, what do you consider the most important day in your life?” Though his inquirer expected him to say the day he was ordained or the day he was elected pope, Angelo Roncalli answered, “The day I was baptized!”

CHAPTER ONE



What Is the Sacrament of Baptism?

In this chapter, Franciscan friar and theologian Fr. Nicholas Lohkamp looks at the mystery of the baptismal calling and explores “what it means to be loved into being-in-Christ” through water and the Spirit. His theology and personal reflection on Baptism clarify the meaning of Baptism and its relevance in our everyday lives. Also, Sr. Sandra DiGidio develops the communal dimension of our being baptized into Christ.

A Mystery of Love

Over my long life—I was born in 1925—little by little, by grace and experience, through teaching and study, I have come to believe in the depth and wonder of the mystery of my baptismal calling. It is a mystery that defines me, marks me, purges me,

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penetrates me, and transforms me to the depth of my being. My Baptism shapes who I am and the way I try to live. For me, and for everyone, it all starts with God.

Through faith I know I am loved by God. Everything flows from this. I don't understand it, and I surely don't deserve it! But that's why I am a Catholic: to become more and more caught up in the love of God, the Holy Trinity.

Did you ever get on your knees before a little child? God—Father, Son, and Spirit—abides in and continually loves each little child. How precious and sacred that child! Through Baptism I, too, have become a child of God.

Like everyone else, I take God's love for granted. We forget the gentle and creative power of the Father's love. We presume Jesus will continue to be merciful and compassionate to us. Sadly, we easily take for granted the abiding presence and activity of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Yet we are loved by God, in every moment, in every way! We don't earn the love of God. Through grace, it is freely and mysteriously given! Everything good in our lives, in the world, is a gift of God. Without God's love, we are nothing, and I am nothing. We can do nothing good. We cannot live, we cannot love.

That's why gratitude is at the heart of being a Catholic. Once we realize how little we can be without God, we can only be thankful.

Baptism means I am Christened. I am plunged into the mystery

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of Jesus. I can't fully imagine what that means. Paul puts it clearly: "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). Christening is not just some nice social event. It is God's work. It defines who I am: a Christian. Christening describes how I live, following Jesus. Christening challenges me to be true to my calling. It challenges me to follow Jesus daily with the help of the Spirit, to live every day to the glory of the Father, to live every day as a member of the Church, thus, to be a Catholic.

Jesus: Fully Human, Fully Divine

Our Baptism puts us in touch with Jesus, the Word made flesh, the incarnate expression of God's love. The Father so loved the world that he gave us his son that we might have life through him.

To be a Catholic is to seek to become fully human. As St. Irenaeus said in the early Church, "The glory of God is the human person fully alive." It is Jesus, as human, who helps me become ever more human, and therein to discover the mystery of my calling to share divine life.

Jesus, as human, is the primary sacrament. In becoming human, Jesus is God-with-us. Jesus as human, as son of Mary, reveals outwardly the inward mystery: He is also Son of God. His humanness is the outward sign of inward grace: his divinity. That is the nature of a sacrament. It is an outward (creaturely, human) sign of inward grace.

A Sacramental Life

The Church, the body of Christ, bears new children of God through water and the Spirit. This sign of Baptism has been a key part of the Church from the beginning. Baptized and confirmed in the Spirit, I am led to the altar to celebrate the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, to be a Catholic is to be eucharistic in who I am and in the way I live. Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist initiate me ever more deeply into this mystery of sharing in the life and mission of Jesus.

Living Our Baptism

In a special way, to be Catholic is to be eucharistic. The Eucharist is the very heart and center of Catholic life and activity. In the Eucharist the grace of my baptismal calling deepens and grows. In the Eucharist we hear the Good News of God's saving love, we try to take it to heart and we seek to live it out.

I then join—as one of God's people—with Jesus and all others to share in the death and resurrection of Jesus; I join with all people and all of creation to offer the eucharistic sacrifice. In union with Jesus, the whole Church, the whole world, I want to say yes to the Father. I want to deliver my whole self, my whole life, and all my activity into the hands of the Father. I dare to believe that, in this way, I will share more fully the resurrection of Jesus. Thus, raised to new life, I come to new and holy communion.

Flowing from the Eucharist, our mission is clear and urgent: to

live the gospel in daily life, to leaven our world with loving and just deeds, to become instruments of peace in our world of conflict and division. My calling, my mission, is to promote unity, to become an instrument of peace.

Jesus gave us the command to love everyone, without exception, even our enemies. He called us to love one another as he loves us. Love is the only power that binds people together in unity. The night before he died Jesus prayed: “. . . that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us. . .”(John 17:21).

It is love, only love, that binds us together as one. Of course this love is not just a make-believe word. This love treats every person with respect, and condemns all racism and inequality. This love treats every person in a pure and holy manner, and condemns all sexual abuse. This love demands justice for everyone, and condemns all injustice and oppression. This love is expressed in deed and in truth, and condemns all deceit and dishonesty. This is the love of Jesus. This is our baptismal and eucharistic mission, our calling.

Called to conversion. If I am to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, if I am to live out my baptismal calling, I must continually change for the better. I must grow. I must daily change my mind and heart and believe the Good News (Mark 1:15). I must continually seek to change my evil ways; I must change my good ways to

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better ways. I must live a life of gospel penance (conversion).

In Baptism I am washed clean. But I live in a world marked by evil; I experience all sorts of inclinations to evil; I do evil; I commit sin. So I must struggle to follow Jesus. I need the grace of the Spirit to overcome evil and make good choices.

I am called to enter daily into the dying of Jesus, so as to share ever more in his risen life. Little by little I become holy, more and more alive in Jesus. I grow in responding to the grace of the Holy Spirit. I grow in making good choices, seeking the Father's will in my daily life.

Called to suffer. There is suffering in my life, in everyone's life. Paul says we are "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being given up to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Corinthians 4:10–11).

As a Catholic I must come to grips with the mystery of suffering. Pain, sickness, suffering, and death are in my life; the result of sin and the limitations of creaturely existence. I am confused and uncertain as to the meaning of suffering, or how I can deal with it. But, as a Catholic, I believe I can deal with the mystery of suffering in union with Jesus. As Paul says, "For to you has been granted, for the sake of Christ, not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him" (Philippians 1:29).