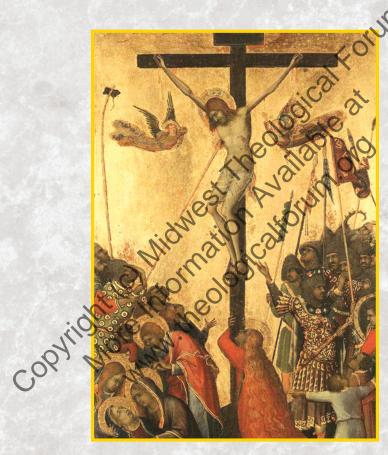
The Sacraments

Source of Our Life in Christ



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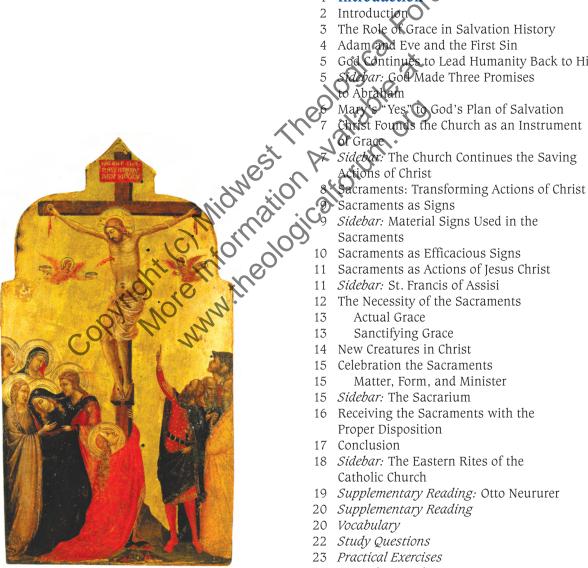


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The Sacraments

CHAPTER 1



Baptism

Through the Sacrament of Baptism, a person is cleansed of all sin, both original and actual, becomes a member of the Body of Christ, and receives the grace needed to enter Heaven.

The Sacraments

CHAPTER 1

Baptism

fter the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven, the Apostles were hesitant and ansure about how to proceed with the mission that Christ had given them. It was at Pentecost that Jesus fulfilled his promise of sending the Holy Spirit who inspired them to begin the work of the Church. Leaving the upper room where they had been hiding in fear, the Apostles went out into the streets to announce the Good News. St. Peter, speaking for the twelve, addressed the crowds, saying:

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, for the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him. (Acts 2: 38-39)

The Acts of the Apostles tells us that "those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves... to the breaking of bread and the prayers." 1

The story of Pentecost gives us a clear description of how the Sacraments of Initiation were celebrated in the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem. Beginning on the day of Pentecost, the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist have always laid the foundation of the Christian life. The faithful are born anew in the Sacrament of Baptism, strengthened by the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Confirmation, and spiritually nourished by the Holy Eucharist.²

Just as it was in the early Church, the Sacrament of Baptism is the first Sacrament we receive, ushering us into the Church and new life in Christ. In this chapter we will look at the origins of the practice of Baptism, the theology behind the Sacrament, and the way it is practiced in the Catholic Church.

IN THIS CHAPTER, WE WILL ADDRESS SEVERAL QUESTIONS:

- ★ What is the Sacrament of Baptism?
- Why is it necessary?
- ★ What is the meaning of Baptism in the life of a Christian?
- ♣ How is Baptism celebrated?
- ★ What is the role of parents and godparents in the Baptism of a child?
- ★ What does the Church teach about those who have not received Baptism?



INTRODUCTION

Truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born anew." (Jn 3:5-7)

When the Pharisee Nicodemus secretly came to see Jesus at night he was confused and surprised by what he heard. No one can enter the kingdom of God, Jesus told him, without being "born anew." Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus meant by being "born anew," which seemed to imply that we must be reborn to have hope of eternal life with God.

A person is first born from his or her mother's womb. This birth, common to all human beings, gives biological life to the individual and membership in the human community. However, Jesus was speaking about a different kind of birth, a birth through the water of Baptism, by which the Holy Spirit gives supernatural life and membership in the family of God.

Baptism is the doorway into the life of Christ and his Mystical Body, the Church. Through Baptism, the individual receives membership in the Church and access to the other sacraments, in particular the Eucharist and Confirmation. Therefore, Baptism is seen as the basis and foundation of the Christian life.



The Great Flood by Bonaventura Peeters. In the Old Testament, there are many examples in which events connected to water prefigure the Sacrament of Baptism.

PREFIGURATION OF BAPTISM IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Easter Vigil liturgy, the Church reminds us that "water" has long held an important role in the history of salvation as a symbol of the creative power of God and of purification. The first reading at Easter Vigil from the Book of Genesis describes how, at the dawn of Creation, the Spirit breathed on the waters, making them a wellspring of holiness.

Water is a source of life and fruitfulness on earth. Because of its vitality to human life, it has also been at the center of religious expression and has played a particularly central role in some of the most significant events recorded in Sacred Scripture.

In the Old Testament, there are many examples in which events connected to water prefigure the Sacrament of Baptism. In particular, we see Baptism prefigured in the story of Noah and the flood; in the crossing of the Red Sea; and in the crossing of the River Jordan when the Israelites arrived in the Promised Land.

During the time of Noah, Sacred Scripture tells us that humanity was wicked and evil, and that God decided to purge the world of this wickedness by sending a great flood. However, he decided to spare one righteous

man, Noah, and his family. He instructed Noah to build an ark, which would save him and his family from the waters of the flood.

In the story of Noah, water is the means by which God brings about a cleansing of the earth. As in Baptism, the sins of the world are washed away by water. Additionally, one can also see in the image of the ark a "type" for the Church. While the waters raged around them, Noah and his family were safe within the walls of the ark.

In his first epistle, St. Peter draws the connection between the meaning of the story of Noah and the Sacrament of Baptism.

God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (1 Pt 3: 20-21)

Similarly, in the story of the exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, we can see how God's Chosen People were saved by water. Having endured generations of slavery, God sent Moses to lead his Chosen People out of captivity. However, this could only be accomplished after God had sent plagues upon Egypt, which initially prompted Pharaoh to allow the Israelites to leave.



Moses Drawing Water From The Rock by Tintoretto.
"They drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them,
and the Rock was Christ." (1 Cor 10:4)

However, once the Israelites left their captivity. Pharach changed his mind, and sent his armies to track down the Israelites and staughter them. Surrounded and facing certain annihilation, the Israelites escaped when God parted the Red Sea. Once they had safely crossed, the waters closed in on the pursuing Egyptian forces.

In this episode from the Book of Exodus, we can see a prefiguration of Baptism. Those who pass through the waters of Baptism are freed from the slavery of sin, while their former lives and habits are washed away. St. Paul refers to this event when speaking to the Corinthians about Baptism and the Eucharist.

I want you to know, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

(1 Cor 10:1-4)

After forty years of wandering in the desert, the Israelites crossed the River Jordan and entered into the land, which had been promised to them by God. This event again prefigures Baptism, which is understood as the beginning of a Christian's journey toward the Kingdom of Heaven.

As we saw in the previous chapter, God uses the materials of the physical world to reveal