

# CHRISTIAN INITIATION, GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. In the sacraments of Christian initiation we are freed from the power of darkness and joined to Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. We receive the Spirit of filial adoption and are part of the entire people of God in the celebration of the memorial of the Lord's death and resurrection.<sup>1</sup>
2. Baptism incorporates us into Christ and forms us into God's people. This first sacrament pardons all our sins, rescues us from the power of darkness, and brings us to the dignity of adopted children,<sup>2</sup> a new creation through water and the Holy Spirit. Hence we are called and are indeed the children of God.<sup>3</sup>

By signing us with the gift of the Spirit, confirmation makes us more completely the image of the Lord and fills us with the Holy Spirit, so that we may bear witness to him before all the world and work to bring the Body of Christ to its fullness as soon as possible.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, coming to the table of the eucharist, we eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man so that we may have eternal life<sup>5</sup> and show forth the unity of God's people. By offering ourselves with Christ, we share in the universal sacrifice, that is, the entire community of the redeemed offered to God by their High Priest,<sup>6</sup> and we pray for a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so that the whole human race may be brought into the unity of God's family.<sup>7</sup>

Thus the three sacraments of Christian initiation closely combine to bring us, the faithful of Christ, to his full stature and to enable us to carry out the mission of the entire people of God in the Church and in the world.<sup>8</sup>

## DIGNITY OF BAPTISM

3. Baptism, the door to life and to the kingdom of God, is the first sacrament of the New Law, which Christ offered to all, that they might have eternal life.<sup>9</sup> He later entrusted this sacrament and the Gospel to his Church, when he told his apostles: "Go, make disciples of all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."<sup>10</sup> Baptism is therefore, above all, the sacrament of that faith by which, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we respond to the Gospel of Christ. That is why the Church believes that it is its most basic and necessary duty to inspire all, catechumens, parents of children still to be baptized, and godparents, to that true and living faith by which they hold fast to Christ and enter into or confirm their commitment to the New Covenant. In order to enliven such faith, the Church prescribes the pastoral instruction of catechumens, the preparation of the children's parents, the celebration of God's word, and the profession of faith at the celebration of baptism.
4. Further, baptism is the sacrament by which its recipients are incorporated into the Church and are built up together in the Spirit into a house where God lives,<sup>11</sup> into a holy nation and a royal priesthood.<sup>12</sup> Baptism is a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been signed by it.<sup>13</sup> Because of that unchangeable effect (given expression in the Latin liturgy by the anointing of the baptized person with chrism in the presence of God's people), the rite of baptism is held in highest honour by all Christians. Once it has been validly celebrated,

even if by Christians with whom we are not in full communion, it may never lawfully be repeated.

5. Baptism, the cleansing with water by the power of the living word,<sup>14</sup> washes away every stain of sin, original and personal, makes us sharers in God's own life<sup>15</sup> and his adopted children.<sup>16</sup> As proclaimed in the prayers for the blessing of water, baptism is a cleansing water of rebirth<sup>17</sup> that makes us God's children born from on high. The blessed Trinity is invoked over those who are to be baptized, so that all who are signed in this name are consecrated to the Trinity and enter into communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are prepared for this high dignity and led to it by the scriptural readings, the prayer of the community, and their own profession of belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
6. Far superior to the purifications of the Old Law, baptism produces these effects by the power of the mystery of the Lord's passion and resurrection. Those who are baptized are united to Christ in a death like his;<sup>18</sup> buried with him in death, they are given life again with him, and with him they rise again.<sup>19</sup> For baptism recalls and makes present the paschal mystery itself, because in baptism we pass from the death of sin into life. The celebration of baptism should therefore reflect the joy of the resurrection especially when the celebration takes place during the Easter Vigil or on a Sunday.

## **OFFICES AND MINISTRIES OF BAPTISM**

7. The preparation for baptism and Christian instruction are both of vital concern to God's people, the Church, which hands on and nourishes the faith received from the apostles. Through the ministry of the Church, adults are called to the Gospel by the Holy Spirit and infants are baptized in the faith of the Church and brought up in that faith. Therefore it is most important that catechists and other laypersons should work with priests and deacons in the preparation for baptism. In the actual celebration, the people of God (represented not only by the parents, godparents, and relatives, but also, as far as possible, by friends, neighbours, and some members of the local Church) should take an active part. Thus they will show their common faith and the shared joy with which the newly baptized are received into the community of the Church.
8. It is a very ancient custom of the Church that adults are not admitted to baptism without godparents, members of the Christian community who will assist the candidates at least in the final preparation for baptism and after baptism will help them persevere in the faith and in their lives as Christians. In the baptism of children, as well, godparents are to be present in order to represent both the expanded spiritual family of the one to be baptized and the role of the Church as a mother. As occasion offers, godparents help the parents so that children will come to profess the faith and live up to it.
9. At least in the later rites of the catechumenate and in the actual celebration of baptism, the part of godparents is to testify to the faith of adult candidates or, together with the parents, to profess the Church's faith, in which children are baptized.
10. Therefore godparents, chosen by the catechumens or by the families of children to be baptized, must, in the judgment of the parish priest (pastor), be qualified to carry out the proper liturgical functions mentioned in no. 9.
  1. Godparents are persons, other than the parents of candidates, who are designated by the candidates themselves or by a candidate's parents or whoever stands in the place

- of parents, or, in the absence of these, by the parish priest (pastor) or the minister of baptism. Each candidate may have either a godmother or a godfather or both a godmother and a godfather.
2. Those designated must have the capability and intention of carrying out the responsibility of a godparent and be mature enough to do so. A person sixteen years of age is presumed to have the requisite maturity, but the diocesan bishop may have stipulated another age or the parish priest (pastor) or the minister may decide that there is a legitimate reason for allowing an exception.
  3. Those designated as godparents must have received the three sacraments of initiation, baptism, confirmation, and eucharist, and be living a life consistent with faith and with the responsibility of a godparent.
  4. Those designated as godparents must also be members of the Catholic Church and be canonically free to carry out this office. At the request of parents, a baptized and believing Christian not belonging to the Catholic Church may act as a Christian witness along with a Catholic godparent.<sup>20</sup> In the case of separated Eastern Christians with whom we do not have full communion the special discipline for the Eastern Churches is to be respected.
11. The ordinary ministers of baptism are bishops, priests, and deacons.
    1. In every celebration of this sacrament they should be mindful that they act in the Church in the name of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.
    2. They should therefore be diligent in the ministry of the word of God and in the manner of celebrating the sacrament. They must avoid any action that the faithful could rightly regard as favouritism.<sup>21</sup>
    3. Except in a case of necessity, these ministers are not to confer baptism outside their own territory, even on their own subjects, without the requisite permission.
  12. Bishops are the chief stewards of the mysteries of God and leaders of the entire liturgical life in the Church committed to them.<sup>22</sup> This is why they direct the conferring of baptism, which brings to the recipient a share in the kingly priesthood of Christ.<sup>23</sup> Therefore bishops should personally celebrate baptism, especially at the Easter Vigil. They should have a particular concern for the preparation and baptism of adults.
  13. It is the duty of pastors to assist the bishop in the instruction and baptism of the adults entrusted to their care, unless the bishop makes other provisions. Pastors, with the assistance of catechists or other qualified laypersons, have the duty of preparing the parents and godparents of children through appropriate pastoral guidance and of baptizing the children.
  14. Other priests and deacons, since they are co-workers in the ministry of bishops and parish priests (pastors), also prepare candidates for baptism and, by the invitation or consent of the bishop or parish priest (pastor), celebrate the sacrament.
  15. The celebrant of baptism may be assisted by other priests and deacons and also by laypersons in those parts that pertain to them, especially if there are a large number to be baptized. Provision for this is made in various parts of the rituals for adults and for children.
  16. In imminent danger of death and especially at the moment of death, when no priest or deacon is available, any member of the faithful, indeed anyone with the right intention, may and sometimes must administer baptism. In a case simply of danger of death the sacrament should be administered, if possible, by a member of the faithful according to one of the shorter rites provided for this situation.<sup>24</sup> Even in this case a small community

should be formed to assist at the rite or, if possible, at least one or two witnesses should be present.

17. Since they belong to the priestly people, all laypersons, especially parents and, by reason of their work, catechists, midwives, family or social workers or nurses of the sick, as well as physicians and surgeons, should be thoroughly aware, according to their capacities, of the proper method of baptizing in case of emergency. They should be taught by pastors, deacons, and catechists. Bishops should provide appropriate means within their diocese for such instruction.

## **REQUIREMENTS FOR THE CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM**

18. The water used in baptism should be true water and, both for the sake of authentic sacramental symbolism and for hygienic reasons, should be pure and clean.
19. The baptismal font, or the vessel in which on occasion the water is prepared for celebration of the sacrament in the sanctuary, should be spotlessly clean and of pleasing design.
20. If the climate requires, provision should be made for the water to be heated beforehand.
21. Except in case of necessity, a priest or deacon is to use only water that has been blessed for the rite. The water blessed at the Easter Vigil should, if possible, be kept and used throughout the Easter season to signify more clearly the relationship between the sacrament of baptism and the paschal mystery. Outside the Easter season, it is desirable that the water be blessed for each occasion, in order that the words of blessing may explicitly express the mystery of salvation that the Church remembers and proclaims. If the baptistery is supplied with running water, the blessing is given as the water flows.
22. As the rite for baptizing, either immersion, which is more suitable as a symbol of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, or pouring may lawfully be used.
23. The words for conferring baptism in the Latin Church are: I BAPTIZE YOU IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.
24. For celebrating the liturgy of the word of God a suitable place should be provided in the baptistery or in the church.
25. The baptistery or the area where the baptismal font is located should be reserved for the sacrament of baptism and should be worthy to serve as the place where Christians are reborn in water and the Holy Spirit. The baptistery may be situated in a chapel either inside or outside the church or in some other part of the church easily seen by the faithful; it should be large enough to accommodate a good number of people. After the Easter season, the Easter candle should be kept reverently in the baptistery, in such a way that it can be lighted for the celebration of baptism and so that from it the candles for the newly baptized can easily be lighted.
26. In the celebration the parts of the rite that are to be celebrated outside the baptistery should be carried out in different areas of the church that most conveniently suit the size of the congregation and the several parts of the baptismal liturgy. When the baptistery cannot accommodate all the catechumens and the congregation, the parts of the rite that are customarily celebrated inside the baptistery may be transferred to some other suitable area of the church.

27. As far as possible, all recently born babies should be baptized at a common celebration on the same day. Except for a good reason, baptism should not be celebrated more than once on the same day in the same church.
28. Further details concerning the time for baptism of adults and of children will be found in the respective rituals. But at all times the celebration of the sacrament should have a markedly paschal character.
29. Parish priests (pastors) must carefully and without delay record in the baptismal register the names of those baptized, of the minister, parents, and godparents, as well as the place and date of baptism.

### **ADAPTATIONS BY THE CONFERENCES OF BISHOPS**

30. According to the Constitution on the Liturgy (art. 63, b), it is within the competence of the conferences of bishops to compose for their local rituals a section corresponding to this one in the Roman Ritual, adapted to the needs of their respective regions. After it has been reviewed by the Apostolic See, it may be used in the regions for which it was prepared.

In this connection, it is the responsibility of each conference of bishops:

1. to decide on the adaptations mentioned in the Constitution on the Liturgy (art. 39);
  2. carefully and prudently to weigh what elements of a people's distinctive traditions and culture may suitably be admitted into divine worship and so to propose to the Apostolic See other adaptations considered useful or necessary that will be introduced with its consent;
  3. to retain distinctive elements of any existing local rituals, as long as they conform to the Constitution on the Liturgy and correspond to contemporary needs, or to modify such elements;
  4. to prepare translations of the texts that genuinely reflect the characteristics of various languages and cultures and to add, whenever helpful, music suitable for singing;
  5. to adapt and augment the Introductions contained in the Roman Ritual, so that the ministers may fully understand the meaning of the rites and carry them out effectively;
  6. to arrange the material in the various editions of the liturgical books prepared under the guidance of the conference of bishops, so that these books may better suit pastoral use.
31. Taking into consideration especially the norms in the Constitution on the Liturgy (art. 37–40, 65), the conferences of bishops in mission countries have the responsibility of judging whether the elements of initiation in use among some peoples can be adapted for the rite of Christian baptism and of deciding whether such elements are to be incorporated into the rite.
  32. When the Roman Ritual for baptism provides several optional formularies, local rituals may add other formularies of the same kind.
  33. The celebration of baptism is greatly enhanced by the use of song, which stimulates in the participants a sense of their unity, fosters their praying together, and expresses the joy of Easter that should permeate the whole rite. The conference of bishops should therefore

encourage and help specialists in music to compose settings for those liturgical texts particularly suited to congregational singing.

## ADAPTATIONS BY THE MINISTER OF BAPTISM

34. Taking into account existing circumstances and other needs, as well as the wishes of the faithful, the minister should make full use of the various options allowed in the rite.
35. In addition to the adaptations that are provided in the Roman Ritual for the dialogue and blessings, the minister may make other adaptations for special circumstances. These adaptations will be indicated more fully in the Introductions to the rites of baptism for adults and for children.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See Vatican Council II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad gentes*, no. 14.
- <sup>2</sup> See Colossians 1:13; Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:5. See also Council of Trent, sess. 6, *Decre. de iustificatione*, cap. 4: Denz.-Schon. 1524.
- <sup>3</sup> See 1 John 3:1.
- <sup>4</sup> See Vatican Council II, Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity *Ad gentes*, no. 36.
- <sup>5</sup> See John 6:55.
- <sup>6</sup> See Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 10, 6: PL 41, 284. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 11; Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, no. 2.
- <sup>7</sup> See Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 28.
- <sup>8</sup> See *ibid.*, no. 31.
- <sup>9</sup> See John 3:5.
- <sup>10</sup> Matthew 28:19.
- <sup>11</sup> See Ephesians 2:22.
- <sup>12</sup> See 1 Peter 2:9.
- <sup>13</sup> See Vatican II, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, no. 22.
- <sup>14</sup> See Ephesians 5:26.
- <sup>15</sup> See 2 Peter 1:4.
- <sup>16</sup> See Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5.
- <sup>17</sup> See Titus 3:5.
- <sup>18</sup> See Romans 6:4-5.
- <sup>19</sup> See Ephesians 2:5-6.
- <sup>20</sup> See *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 873 and 874, §§1 and 2.
- <sup>21</sup> See Vatican Council II, Constitution on the Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, art. 32; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, no. 29.
- <sup>22</sup> See Vatican Council II, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops *Christus Dominus*, no. 15.
- <sup>23</sup> See Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, no. 26.
- <sup>24</sup> See Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, nos. 375-399; Rite of Baptism for Children, nos. 157-164.

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