

“THE GIFT OF BAPTISM” REPORT

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St Gregory Nazianzen stated that “Baptism is the most beautiful and magnificent gift...a grace, an anointing, enlightenment, a garment of immortality, a bath of re birth, a seal and a most precious gift”

Introduction

Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to a life lived in union with the Holy Spirit. The Sacrament of Baptism one of the only ones that many ecclesial communities of the Reformation held onto validly is also the doorway which gives access to the other Sacraments of the Catholic Church.

It is a great and magnificent Sacrament where we are re born to God and cleansed from the original sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve and their disobedience in the Garden.

Not least is the fact that by Baptism we are made into mystical members of the Body of Christ. How incredible this is.

What is Baptism?

The word baptism means ‘to plunge’ to be ‘immersed in’ and in the River Jordan, Jesus and the other Jews were submerged in the waters under the Baptism of ‘repentance’ of St John the Baptist. During this theophany when God was publicly proclaimed through the Son the Father said: ‘This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’.

Jesus also called his death and Resurrection a ‘baptism’ as He asked His disciples if they were willing to be baptised with the baptism with which I must be baptized. Jesus also asks each one of us his followers this question. Are we willing to be baptized and die to self to come to the new life of the Resurrection? Are we willing to drink the chalice of God’s will in our lives as Jesus drank it in his or will we be ‘enemies of the Cross of Christ?’ and refuse to accept sufferings for love of him who suffered for us and for all souls.

Because it was in Jesus’ ultimate Baptism that he was immersed in sufferings and sorrows as the ‘suffering servant’ and then ‘plunged’ into death. But God the Father raised him up through the Resurrection. This whole concept of death to self and living for God alone and not the ego is a very very important area which concerns Baptism and being a living, breathing, mystical member of Jesus’ body which cannot be overlooked yet often is.

Indeed, Marino Restrepo who ‘died’ and visited heaven, hell and purgatory emphasizes death to self as an important and crucial element of sanctification and becoming like Christ, being conformed into his image from ‘glory to glory’.

So you can see that baptism is more than the commonly held view of being simply a ritual that parents go through to get their child into the nearest Catholic school although this does happen and is becoming more common.

What are the Effects of Baptism

No, the waters of Baptism do not simply wash over us, the grace of Baptism washes THROUGH us cleansing us of original sin and inherited darkness, exorcising family traits that have been passed down to us. The grace of this Sacrament really does change and strengthen our souls from within.

One major effect of Baptism is that we then become 'Christians', re-born as God's army on earth, re born from the darkness of sin and we become children of light and of the day.

We are called to be the salt of the earth and only a small bit of salt makes a real difference to it's surroundings! That's what we are called to be. It is a high and mighty dignity indeed.

Through water and the Spirit (in union with Christ's Resurrection from the dead) during Baptism we become a 'new creation' with a 'new life', a life now lived IN Christ, THROUGH Christ and which belongs to Christ. This new creation means that:

Why Do Parents Baptise Their Children?

'Love is always life giving, where there is love there is always new life' (Humanae Vitae).

Because parents share in God's creative love, they are privileged to share in the most important part of God's creation-the creation of a new person, a child who then is called to become an adopted child of God through Baptism. A parent's generosity and love towards their children is:

'a brilliant reflection of the Creator's love when he first brought the world into being'.

Hence, born of God's love, children are to grow in God's love and receiving the Sacrament of Baptism is the first stepping stone and most important one towards being freed of sin and set free to live in God's love and to grow in knowledge of God's love.

The role of parents in the baptism of their children is that the parents accept the responsibility of training their child in the practice of the Catholic faith and of bringing the child up to keep God's commandments by loving God and their neighbour as themselves.

At the Baptism, parents publicly ask that their child be baptised, and sign their child with the sign of the cross, they renounce Satan on their child's behalf and make their profession of faith for their child. Parents also hold a lighted candle as a symbol of the 'light' of faith in the world, and, at the end of the Baptism the parents are blessed with the special prayers for mothers and fathers.

Godparents also desire baptism for their godchild and they 'ust be able and ready to help the newly baptised-on the road of Christian life'.(CCC 1255). 'In the baptism of infants the role of the godparents is secondary to the parents. If necessary, they should be ready to help in the spiritual education of their godchild. The godparent should be -sufficiently mature, -already initiated as a Christian, -and a member of the Catholic Church. A baptised person of a non-Catholic Church may act as a godparent provided that the other godparent is a Catholic' (CCC). Hence the role of a godparent in the spiritual welfare of their Godchild is important too and parents should seek those of the faith who will make good examples to their children as they grow in faith and wisdom.

Why were you Baptised as a child?

We are all born with human nature which is stained by original sin, we all need and this includes children, a new birth in Baptism to be freed from the powers of darkness and to be brought into the freedom of the children of God. The CCC states that;

'The church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth'. (CCC1250)

But babies are not able to give themselves to God at such an age, and can they 'believe' in God when all they can think about is their next feed or that their nappy needs changing!

Well, the Church knows this and believes that in the baptism of infants the faith and desire (the desire for Baptism is expressed by the baby's parents at the Baptism Service) of the Church is sufficient. So, it is the parents and godparents (who represent at the Baptism, all the saints and believers), that give their permission on the infant's behalf to the Baptism.

The baby's role in the Baptism is merely to be a 'receiver' of the great gift.

When we start to 'grow up' both in our body's and in the faith of the Church we begin to realise that no matter how old or young we are we cannot give God anything but rather that God gives Himself to us in purest Love, it is our duty then to receive God well into our lives and respond to His great Love for us, then by responding to His great love for us we want to do things for God and for others to make others happy.

As Jesus said in the Bible, he loves this ability in us to receive His great gifts (which includes Holy Communion in particular) for:

'Unless you become like little children you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven'. So it is to such 'little children' that the Kingdom belongs, the ones who will receive Jesus into the innocence of their souls. As Jesus said himself; 'Let the children come to me, do not hinder them'.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church points out that after baptism of children 'there is a need not only for instruction after Baptism but also for the necessary flowering of baptismal grace in personal growth.' Such as through catechesis in the home and attending catechism classes to grow in the faith.

Why are children baptised?

Jesus said: 'Unless a man is born again through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God'. Jesus also commanded his disciples to go out to the whole world and preach the Good News, baptising them 'in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit'. The CCC states that:

'Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this Sacrament.' (CCC 1257)

Therefore we can understand why the Church takes 'great care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptised are 'reborn of water and the Spirit'. (CCC.1257)

Children are baptized so as not to limit or delay to effects on grace on their souls through Baptism. If we look at the graces and effects of Baptism it becomes clear why this great gift is bestowed on children in their infancy:

The Graces and Effects of Baptism-there are many and I consider the main ones here:

1. The first effect is the forgiveness of sins, all sins are forgiven (the original sin inherited from Adam and Eve (as well as all personal sin if the person being baptised has sinned and passed the age of reason which is usually seven years old). The temporal punishment due to sin is also cleansed and washed away. If the person died straight after baptism they would go straight to Heaven, nothing stands in the way of entrance into God's Kingdom once Baptism has taken place and before sin is committed.
2. Certain 'consequences' of sin still however remain in us after Baptism such as suffering, illness, human frailty such as weaknesses of character etc together with the capacity to sin. We are left

to 'wrestle with' these during the course of our lives on earth and they serve to keep us humble and seek union with the Lord. (CCC1264)

3. A further effect of Baptism is most wonderful, we become 'new creatures' and adopted sons of our Heavenly father. Through grace we come to 'share in the Divine Nature of God' and become 'members of Christ and therefore co-heirs with Him' to His Heavenly Kingdom (remembering that Jesus said 'My kingdom is not of this world'). Becoming an heir to Heaven with our older brother Jesus is no small thing. One drop of supernatural grace is worth all the riches and wealth of the natural world combined in the order of things. Supernatural is a Divine sharing whereas without God we are just natural beings.

During Baptism we receive the free and great gift of being made into **Temples of the Living God. The Holy Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit come and dwell in our souls. This is the gift above all gifts that the Most Holy Trinity lives in us, (and does so for the rest of our lives provided that we remain in the state of 'sanctifying grace') and in fact: 'Our human nature is transformed by the Divine Light dwelling in us after Baptism'**

What is Sanctifying Grace?

We are given the free and great gift of 'sanctifying' grace on the day of our Baptism. This gift is a particular type of grace given by God through his Love that helps us to participate in God's own Triune life. It is Divine as all grace is and it makes us holy, it sanctifies us.

Sanctifying grace can lie dormant in our souls or unknown but by it the power of God rests upon us and we are temples of the Trinity. We can lose or reject sanctifying grace through serious, mortal that is deadly sin. We do this using our free will by committing serious sin and not being sorry for these sins and going to Confession to confess it. The area of sin is another area in itself.

Being given the gift of sanctifying grace is a 'clothing of grace' and we receive this at our baptism. Sanctifying grace has great effects on our souls, it:

- Gives the baptised the ability to believe in God, to hope in God and to Love God for the rest of their lives if they so wish.
- Gives the power to live and act under the prompting of the Holy Spirit through using the GIFTS of the Holy Spirit which are all bestowed at Baptism, these gifts need to be used by the baptised person. We are inspired to use them by praying to God and asking for His help at all times, this in itself is an act of humility.
- Permits the baptised person to grow in goodness and sanctity throughout their lives, with the help of God and the actual grace God provides for each person's needs (we call this Divine help 'actual grace' which should be asked and prayed for).
- Enables us to become mystical members of the Body of Christ on earth with Christ as our Head. We also through the Sacrament become members of the Catholic Church and hence are set up as 'living stones' to be built into 'a spiritual house', a 'holy nation' and by consequence, 'God's own people'.

Therefore, as re-born sons of God, baptised persons should show in their lives the faith they have received from God on the day of their Baptism, a faith that has been sealed in by the Sacrament and in fact a Christian will be 'stamped' with a mark of Baptism on their soul for all eternity no matter where he may end up.

This mark on the soul shows that they are the property of Christ and no sin can ever 'rub out' this mark. Hence, given once and for all Baptism cannot be repeated.

The Service of Baptism

The Service of Baptism is a celebration of great beauty and a brief outline (of a child's service) illustrates this point:

*The sign of the Cross is made on the forehead of the child, to signify the grace of redemption which Christ has won for the child by Christ's death on the cross which has ransomed the child's soul for himself.

*The parents and godparents are asked direct questions-What do they seek from the Church? Are they aware of the obligations they are undertaking? Will the godparents be prepared to assist the parents in the upbringing in faith of the child?

*Then there is a Scripture reading which is meant to nourish all present and increase their faith 'faith comes from hearing the word of God'.

* Special prayers are then said over the child to bring the child out of darkness into the light of God. The child is then anointed with the oil of catechumens which represents the freeing of the child from the darkness that threatens us and prepares the child for the 'combat' of the Christian life. The child is being enrolled in the army of Christ.

*The parents then profess their faith and renounce the devil on behalf of the child.

*The Baptism itself follows, this fully attaches the Christian to Christ. The minister pours out the waters of baptism saying: 'I baptise you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'. The entry 'into the life of the Most Holy Trinity' is shown by a triple pouring out of water on the child. (CCC1239)

*Next, 3 traditional ceremonies take place,

>The child is anointed with chrism-this is the sign that God has stamped his seal upon the baptised. The baptised child is by this act anointed with the Holy Spirit, just as Christ was anointed in his mission on earth as 'priest, prophet and king' we are anointed to share in Christ's saving mission.

>The child is then clothed in a white garment which symbolises the reception of sanctifying grace and that the baptised has 'put on Christ' in his purity and innocence, a lamb without spot.

>The baptismal candle is then given, symbolising the baptised has been given the light of Christ in the world and that the light of faith should be kept alive in our hearts and like Christ, we should live as 'lights in the world'.

Upon this entry into the Church as just as: 'Baptism is the source of responsibilities and duties that the baptised person must undertake (for Christ) the baptised person also enjoys rights within the Church : to receive the sacraments at the appropriate times, to be nourished by the Word of God and to be sustained by the other spiritual helps of the Church' (Lumen Gentium 37)

The child is now a member of Christ's body and of the Church ready to be prepared for the other Sacraments ahead.

Conclusion

I am sure now that you've read a little more about Baptism that you would agree with St Gregory that: **'Baptism is the most beautiful and magnificent gift...a grace, an anointing, an enlightenment, a garment of immortality, a bath of re birth, a seal and a most precious gift.'**

'The newly baptised is now a child of God and a co-heir of the Heavenly Kingdom.

Each person, as many Saints have said should remember the anniversary day of their Baptism and thank God for this gift freely bestowed on them often through the faith of their parents. The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord on the first Sunday after Epiphany in January is also a good day to renew our Baptismal promises and give thanks for this great gift and all the graces given.

Prayer:

'Thankyou God for creating me and making me your child in Baptism. Please help me to remember how blessed I am to have received this great gift and I pray for all those who haven't received it yet that they may be as blessed as I have been, please help me to use the graces I have received well to grow in your love dear God more and more' Amen.

Bibliography of main texts used:CCC=Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992, published by order of Pope John Paul II),The Illustrated Catechism (Redemptorist Publications),Catechism of Catholic Doctrine (Jubilee Edition).