

Baptism

In the Light of Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Liturgical Documents

Lit 84

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Contents

INTRODUCTION 4

PROCEDURE 4

THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF CELEBRATION 5

THE GENERAL STRUCTURE 8

RECEPTION OF THE CHILD 9

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS AND GODPARENTS 9

THE BAPTISMAL NAME 13

THE SIGNING WITH THE CROSS 14

THE BAPTISMAL PROCESSION 14

LITURGY OF THE WORD 14

READINGS 15

HOMILY 15

INTERCESSIONS AND LITANY 16

PRAYER OF EXORCISM AND PRE-BAPTISMAL ANOINTING 16

CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT 18

BLESSING OF WATER FOR BAPTISM 18

RENUNCIATION OF SIN AND PROFESSION OF FAITH 19

BAPTISM 20

EXPLANATORY RITES 21

POST-BAPTISMAL ANOINTING 21

THE WHITE GARMENT 22

THE LIGHTED CANDLE 22

EPHPHETHA 23

CONCLUSION OF THE RITE 24

THE LORD'S PRAYER 24

THE BAPTISMAL BLESSING 24

INTRODUCTION

PROCEDURE

“The meaning and grace of the sacrament of Baptism are clearly seen in the rites of its celebration. By following the gestures and words of this celebration with attentive participation, the faithful are initiated into the riches this sacrament signifies and actually brings about in each newly baptised person.”¹

¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1234.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

WHO CAN RECEIVE BAPTISM

THE PRACTICE OF INFANT BAPTISM

Alice was an earnest young woman that was a staunch member of a certain branch of the Baptist Church. For some reason she vehemently resented anything that spoke of Catholicism. Ironically, due to a combination of circumstances she and the rest of her family became great friends of mine, even though they knew that I was a Catholic priest. But very early in our friendship it was tacitly agreed that we avoid arguments regarding our different creeds, for they always ended in misunderstanding and stalemate. One day Alice came to visit me with her fiancé. To my surprise I came to learn that Alexander was not only a Catholic but also one who passionately believed and practiced his faith. He was particularly devoted to Our Lady and often went to places of pilgrimages. Alice of course would not want to hear about any of that. And yet they were deeply in love with each other, and they intended eventually to get married.

One day Alexander took me aside and told me about their predicament. Since none of the two wanted to abandon their faith, they had agreed on a mixed marriage. But they strongly felt that the question of the faith of their children and the latter's baptism had to be decided before the life-long commitment in order to avoid future quarrels. It wasn't so much a question as to which Church the children should belong. Rather, it was more of a question as to the time when children should be baptised. Alexander insisted that he wanted to have his children baptised as infants, in accordance to long Catholic tradition. Alice was convinced that this would be tantamount to a sin of presumption. God wants us to freely choose our faith. Children should be allowed to grow to the age

when they can decide to be baptised. So it was in the bible; so it should be. Typical of the average pious Catholic, Alexander did not have as many biblical and theological arguments to put forward before the greater familiarity with sacred Scripture, of his fiancée. He wanted to know what advice I as a Catholic priest would give him.

One of the areas in which many Christian denominations put to task Catholics and other Christians of a similar practice is that of infant baptism. They consider it improper and non-biblical to baptise children in their infancy. Improper because, they argue, baptism should mark conversion, a personal decision and option for Christ. Infants have not yet come to the age of decision so why should they be baptised? It is considered non-biblical, because the baptism that is found in the bible is only of adults. After all, the Lord told his disciples, that after their teaching, those who will believe will be baptised. In a way infant baptism would seem to violate the rights of the child, to accept God's invitation of salvation or not to receive it. God, however much he loves us, makes us free to accept or reject his love. Why should the Church impose that love on the children?

Baptism of infants is a later development in the Church.² The earliest baptisms were of adults that had converted to the faith. That is quite understandable since Christianity was a new faith. No one would have expected children below the age of reason to have come to ask for baptism. But then with time the converts bore children. The question comes up whether parents should wait until their children become adults and decide for themselves whether to embrace the faith or not. After all, parents wish the best for their children. They give them the best nourishment, the best clothing, the best shelter. They try to raise them as good and responsible people, passing on to them the values which they uphold. Naturally if they are believers in the promise of salvation they should want their children too to attain to that promise. In the same way that they do not wait until a child is grown into an adult before teaching him or her the morals they uphold, so also they do not wait before having them baptised. The Lord had said to Nicodemus that "unless a man is reborn in water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." (John 3: 5). That was not easy for Nicodemus to understand, but it was not expected of him to

² *Rite of Baptism for Children, 1-2.*

comprehend either. Now death does not always wait until a child has grown to adulthood and the age of personal decision.

The necessity of baptism for salvation is a mystery. Nicodemus could not understand that, anymore that we could today. The Lord comprehended the limitation of his knowledge, and told him that that is natural. In the same way that he could not understand where the wind came from and where it went, so also could he not understand the divine mysteries. Only he who came from above could fully understand the things from above.

The case for infant baptism can also be argued on the basis of the Jewish practice of circumcision of babies 8 days old. These babies did not understand what was performed on them, yet it was performed on them all the same. The Lord showed his approval of the custom by undergoing it himself.

None of us is personally responsible for the original sin which we are born with and which baptism wipes away from us. It stands to reason that if we inherit it through no personal fault we can also have it removed without our own merit or conscious decision.

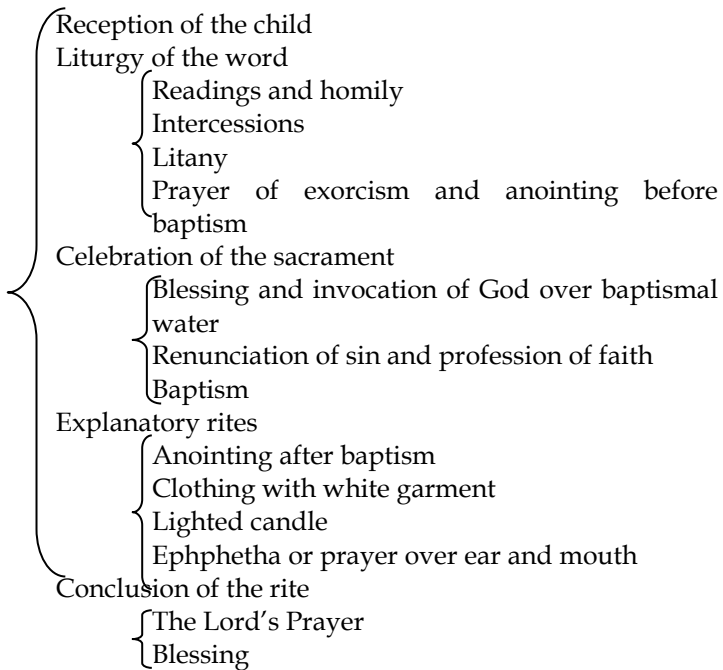
And so it is that a child has a right to receive what its parents believe to be the best for it. Faith is one of those things a child needs to acquire already in infancy. The parents on their part have both the right and the duty to impart what is best for the child. Infant baptism does not remove the child's right to choose its faith later. In fact the whole process of Christian initiation of adults is geared towards a personal decision of those who already received baptism in infancy. Baptism is only the first stage of this long process that is completed with the sacrament of Confirmation and the reception of the Eucharist.

THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF CELEBRATION

The Rite of Baptism for Children consists of the following different rites: The Rite of Baptism for Several Children, the Rite of Baptism for One Child, the Rite of Baptism for a Large Number of Children, the Rite of Baptism for Children Administered by a Catechist when No Priest or Deacon is Available, the Rite of Baptism for Children in Danger of

Death when No Priest or Deacon is Available.³ The Ordinary form is the order of baptism celebrated by the Ordinary Minister.⁴ Baptism, whether for one child, or for several, or even for a larger number, should be celebrated by the ordinary minister and with the full rite when there is no immediate danger of death. The following is the basic structure of the ordinary form of the rite of baptism in summary form.

THE GENERAL STRUCTURE



³ Cf. SC, 68.

⁴ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, 15-19. Cf. RBC, 15; Can. 850.

RECEPTION OF THE CHILD

The rite begins with the reception of the children. This is to indicate the desire of the parents and godparents, as well as the intention of the Church, concerning the celebration of the sacrament of baptism. These purposes are expressed in action when the parents and the celebrant trace the sign of the cross on the foreheads of the children.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARENTS AND GODPARENTS

The parents, god-parents and children wait at the entrance of the church or some other suitable place. The priest and ministers go to the waiting group. The celebrant greets them using the words in the rite or his own. He questions the parents on what name they wish for their child, and what they ask the Church for their child. The parents who have already been instructed give the appropriate answers.

THE FAITHFUL⁵

Baptism makes one become a member of the Church. Therefore the acquisition of a new member should be an occasion of celebration for the Christian community. The community shares the joy of the parents and the godparents by participating in the celebration of baptism. They provide an ambient of love into which the new member is born. Members of the Christian community who are more practising of their faith can urge the weaker ones not to delay the baptism of their children. They can lead the timid to the pastors. They can help to explain to them some of the things the parents do not know about baptism. Now and then a family may be too poor to afford the required

⁵ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, 4.

stole fees. This becomes an opportunity of those that are financially more capable to perform an act of charity towards the needy. Within the liturgy they make their consent at the profession of after the creed. This goes to show that the child's baptism is based not only on the faith of the parents, but of the entire Christian community.

GOD-PARENTS⁶

I once asked a class of twenty seminarians how many knew their godparents. Eight of them did. They I asked them how many of these godparents could be said to have played a role in their spiritual growth. Only one raised the hand. In fact another explained that he was a kind of spiritual guide to his godfather. This kind of situation in which godparents play a minimum role in the spiritual development of their godchildren is unfortunately quite widespread.

To make sure that the child grows in the faith in which it is baptised the Church requires that in normal circumstances every child should have a godparent. This is to ensure that every child, even that born of weak parents in terms of Christian faith, has a chance to be raised in the faith in which they are baptised. It is in fact permissible to have both a godfather and godmother for the same child. The role of the godparents is explained in canon 872: "In so far as possible, a person being baptised is to be assigned a sponsor. In the case of an adult baptism, the sponsor's role is to assist the person in Christian initiation. In the case of an infant baptism, the role is together with the parents to present the child for baptism, and to help it to live a Christian life befitting the baptised and faithfully to fulfil duties inherent in baptism." Godparents should also take time to pray for the children they have sponsored. It is laudable also make sacrifices for their children's spiritual welfare. In the liturgy the godparents promise to assist the child in its journey of faith. Part of their pre-baptismal instruction should be to make them understand that their promises in the liturgy is a serious undertaking.

Normally the godparents are designated by the parents or guardians of the child. If neither parents nor guardians are available, then the pastor or minister of baptism designates the godparents. Those chosen should be mature enough to undertake the responsibility attached to this role.

⁶ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, 6; *Rite of Christian Initiation* 8, 10; *Pastoral Companion* (Revised Edition), 52. Cf. SC, 67.

The minimum age prescribed for a godparent is sixteen years. However, Episcopal Conferences may decide on another suitable age. With a just cause a pastor may allow one who is younger than the prescribed age to be a godparent. This can be the case for instance in the case of a young member of the faithful with outstanding faith and uprightness.

One who acts as godparent should have the intention of carrying out the duty undertaken. In addition he or she ought to have received the three sacraments of Christian initiation. He or she should be a Catholic, legally free to take on that task. The godparent should live a life of faith in harmony with their undertaking. It is unsuitable for instance that those who are in polygamous marriages or those who have divorced should act as godparents. However, circumstances may be such that people of exemplary lives and in short supply. In such a case it is better to have a less-than-perfect godparent than not to have one at all, or to have the same godparent for more children than they can look after. The godparent should neither be the father nor the mother of the child. In some areas the diocese may exclude close relatives as godparents as well. However, these may even be more suitable since they usually have easier access to their godchildren than outsiders.

A baptised person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community may be admitted only in company with a Catholic sponsor, and then simply as a witness to the baptism. (Canon 874 §2).

Members of the clergy should not act as godparents. Their vocation already makes them “godparents” to the rest of the Christian community. In the same way candidates to the priesthood should refrain from accepting to act as godparents, in view of their future ministry. The religious would do better to leave the role of “god parenting” to the lay faithful. Not infrequently do they with the best of intentions but erroneously bias those under their charge towards the vocation they have chosen for themselves. Moreover a healthy Christian community should have enough members to act as godparents without resort to those who have chosen to follow Christ in a consecrated life. Good family friends are usually suitable godparents in so far as they have ready access to the homes of their godchildren.

Occasionally it may happen that at the actual day of baptism the godparent cannot for some reason attend the ceremony. It is permissible under those circumstances for the godparent to appoint someone else to replace them. He or she must in this case make it clear whether the

appointed person is an actual replacement or proxy. In the case of the latter the names of the original godparent are the ones to appear on the baptismal ticket of the child. Moreover the original godparent actually undertakes the responsibilities which the proxy makes on his or her behalf during the celebration of the baptism.

PARENTS⁷

A child's parents play an irreplaceable role in its early development. Even when it is required that each child that is baptised should have a god-parent to ensure its Christian upbringing, still the role of the godparent is far inferior to that of the parent. In the first place under normal circumstances the parent lives with the child and has a daily influence on him or her. It is the parent and not the godparent who lulls the child to sleep, and who therefore is better placed to teach it the habit of praying before going to bed. Secondly, what the child hears from its father or mother, or what it sees them doing has a far greater impact than from those outside the family. Parents therefore have a more important role in the spiritual life of the child than anybody else.

Before taking their child to baptism the parents should seek to understand the meaning of the sacrament of baptism. This they can do through the information of friends who are more church-going. Or they can become informed through reading, for those who can do so and who have access to the relevant literature. The practice of having a Catholic Catechism in the family is a recommendable one. It does not shade light on this sacrament alone, but also on any other moral or dogmatic question that may rise in the course of daily life. It is a similar practice to that of having a dictionary or a set of encyclopaedias in the bookshelf. Parents can above all get informed through attending pre-baptismal instruction. Even those that have attended before – for instance on the occasion of the baptism of others of their children – are required to attend again. This serves as an occasion to be reminded of duties they may have forgotten or neglected. It is also a manifestation of a spirit of solidarity with the Christian community and of oneness in the requirements set down for the betterment of that community. A pastor can of course make exceptions in the instruction of those parents that he knows are well informed of what the course entails.

⁷ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, 5.

Parents in particular should strive to attend in person the actual occasion of baptism of their children. By this they not only demonstrate the importance they attach to this sacrament, they also do so because they have a specific role to play in the baptismal liturgy. It is the parents who publicly ask to have their child baptised. They make a sign of the cross on the child's forehead after the minister has done the same. They renounce Satan and profess the faith on the child's behalf. It is the parents who take the child to the baptismal font where this is used, or who hold it when the minister pours on it the water of baptism. Parents (and/or godparents) hold the lighted candle, to signify that they promise to keep the child's faith burning at least until the child is of age to be responsible for its own actions. The rite of baptism has a special blessing intended for parents, that they may take proper care for the spiritual growth of their children. All this means that the occasion of baptism is the beginning of another set of obligations towards the spiritual good of their children.

THE BAPTISMAL NAME

Regarding the name to be given to the child, Liturgical law does not require that this name necessarily be a name of a saint. What is required is that it is not "foreign" to Christian sentiments.⁸ Many would wish for the purpose of inculturation to give to their children an African name that has meaning for them. The pastor should make it clear to them that they are free to do that, as long as the name is acceptable to Christian sentiment. A name of a local god might for instance be considered "foreign" to Christian sentiment.

On the other hand it is also good that parents get to understand and appreciate the value of giving a Christian name at baptism. They should know that they are free to give as many cultural names as they want to their children, but they do not have to do this on the day of baptism. They could do that at the cultural naming ceremony. On the day of entrance to into the Christian family it would be appropriate that someone takes on a name that identifies them as belonging to that new family. In the Scriptures there are many occasions when a new name

⁸ can. 855.

meant a new vocation, a turning point. The Christian vocation also would also require a new name. Secondly, just as the child receives a god-parent to assist it on its journey of faith, it is also in order that it receives a heavenly one; one who has fought the good struggle of faith and conquered, and one who can now intercede for this new member. The earthly god-parent may forget and neglect his or her duty, but the heavenly one does not. True, each of us has received a guardian angel, but it does no harm to employ extra help in this singular struggle of eternal life or death. To deny the child a Christian name means also that its patron saint cannot be mentioned during the litany of saints, nor can it have a feast day to celebrate in the course of liturgical calendar, apart from All Saints' Day!

THE SIGNING WITH THE CROSS

The pastor welcomes the children in the name of the Church and claims them for Christ, marking them with the sign of the cross. "The sign of the cross, on the threshold of the celebration, marks with the imprint of Christ the one who is going to belong to him and signifies the grace of the redemption Christ won for us by his cross."⁹

THE BAPTISMAL PROCESSION

There may then follow a procession into the church to their places while the pastor and ministers proceed to the altar.

LITURGY OF THE WORD

The liturgy of the word is directed toward stirring up the faith of the parents, godparents and congregation, and praying in common for the fruits of baptism before the sacrament itself. This part of the celebration

⁹ CCC, no. 1235.

consists of the readings of one or more passages from holy scripture; a homily, followed by a period of silence; the prayer of the faithful; and finally a prayer, drawn up in the style of an exorcism, to introduce either the anointing with the oil of catechumens or the laying on of hands.¹⁰

READINGS

Within Mass the readings may be proper to the occasion, i.e. taken from the lectionary for ritual Masses for baptism; or they may be of the day, according to the regulation of the calendar. Quite often a preacher may draw a useful message from readings of the day, and relate it to baptism, without either forcing the application or substituting the day's readings. Outside Mass one or even two gospel readings are taken from among the following: The meeting with Nicodemus (John 3: 1-6), the Apostles are sent to preach the gospel and to baptise Matthew 28: 18-20; The baptism of Jesus Mark 1: 9-11; Let Little children come to me Mark 10: 13-16.¹¹ Other alternative readings may be chosen from the appendix of the ritual.

HOMILY

After the readings, the celebrant gives a short homily, explaining to those present the significance of what has been read. His purpose will be to lead them to a deeper understanding of the mystery of baptism and to encourage the parents and godparents to a ready acceptance of the responsibilities which arise from the sacrament. The homily may also serve to catechise the invited guests, who will not have attended the baptism instruction and who in actual fact may be far removed from Christian practice. Occasions like baptism bring to Church many individuals cut off from active Church life, and therefore serve as rare opportunities for the Church to reach these people. However, the pastor must resist the temptation to preach in a "God-has-given-you-to-me"

¹⁰ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, 17.

¹¹ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, 44.

fashion, striving to teach them all he knows about the sacrament and thus alienating them further, rather than bringing them close.

The homily is followed by a short silence. The silence may also be placed in the course of or after the litany.

INTERCESSIONS AND LITANY

The silence is followed by the intercessions or Prayers of the Faithful.¹² The celebrant is free to take the ones given in the rite (no. 47, or from other alternative provided in nos. 217-220; or even to formulate others.

Without a closing prayer to the intercessions the celebrant adjoins with the Litany. The litany or part of it may be drawn from the Appendix of the ritual. The names of some saints may be added in the proper place such as the patron saint, title of the church, name of the founder. Some petitions adapted to the place and need may be added to the petitions for various needs. The Litany concludes with "All you saints of God, pray for us".

PRAYER OF EXORCISM AND PRE-BAPTISMAL ANOINTING

"Since Baptism signifies liberation from sin and from its instigator the devil, one or more exorcisms are pronounced over the candidate. The celebrant then anoints him with the oil of catechumens, or lays his hands on him, and he explicitly renounces Satan. Thus prepared, he is able to confess the faith of the Church, to which he will be 'entrusted' by Baptism."¹³

There are alternatives from which the minister may choose. However, basically this prayer asks for freedom of the child from original sin and for protection against future struggles with the evil one. The prayer is followed with anointing with the oil of catechumens of the chest.

¹² *Rite of Baptism for Children*, 47.

¹³ CCC, no. 1237.

Episcopal Conferences may decide to have the pre-baptismal anointing omitted.

CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT¹⁴

The celebration of the sacrament is immediately preceded by a) the solemn prayer of the celebrant, who, by invoking God and recalling his plan of salvation, blesses the water of baptism or commemorates its previous blessing; b) the renunciation of Satan on the part of parents and godparents, and their profession of faith, to which is added the assent of the celebrant and the community; and the final interrogation of the parents and godparents. It is performed by washing in water, by way of immersion or infusion, according to local custom, and by the invocation of the blessed Trinity. It is completed, first by the anointing with Chrism, which signifies the royal priesthood of the baptised and enrolment in the fellowship of God's People; then by the ceremonies of the white garment, lighted candle and Ephphetha (the last of which is optional).

BLESSING OF WATER FOR BAPTISM

The celebration of the sacrament begins with a procession to the font. Where there is no font those who bear the children to be baptised are arranged in such a way that the celebrant can easily reach them. Where there are a large number of children they may stand in a row facing the sanctuary. Alternatively they may stand in two lines in the central aisle facing each other, if there is enough space for the celebrant to walk through and to perform baptism; or in one row facing the celebrant as he passes from one child to another. The celebrant briefly reminds the congregation of the wonderful work of God whose plan it is to sanctify humanity, body and soul, through water. He may use his own words or those given in the rite.

¹⁴ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, 18-19; 53-66.

This is followed by the invocation of God over the water.¹⁵ At the end of the anamnetical part that recalls what God has done for mankind through water, comes the blessing or an alternative formula depending on whether the water is already blessed or not. At the actual blessing of the water the celebrant touches the water with his right hand. In alternative formulas he makes the sign of the cross over the water he is blessing. One of the anamnetical formulas mentions the Spirit of God that hovered over the waters of creation, the waters of the great flood through which Noah was saved; the waters of the Red Sea and the saving of Israel; the waters of the Jordan and the baptism of Jesus; the water and blood that flowed from Christ's wounded side giving birth to the Church, and Christ's mandate to his disciples to go out to the whole world and baptise in the name of the Trinity.

During the Easter season, if there is baptismal water which was consecrated at the Easter Vigil, the blessing and invocation of God over the water are nevertheless included, so that this theme of thanksgiving and petition may find a place in the baptism. The forms of this blessing and invocation are those found in the Rite of the Baptism of Children, numbers 223-224 of the Rite, with the variation indicated at the end of each text.¹⁶

RENUNCIATION OF SIN AND PROFESSION OF FAITH

Next follows the Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith. The parents and godparents renounce sin as a sign of their readiness to bring up the children in the practice of the faith in which they are baptised. They are to see that the divine life which God gives their children or god-children is kept safe from the poison of sin, to grow always stronger in their hearts. Whether or not this renunciation and profession has meaning depends to a large extent on the prior catechesis of the parents and god-parents and their own faith. Otherwise it may just be an empty ritual. The parents give their response to the

¹⁵ Cf. SC, 70.

¹⁶ The formula with the anamnetical part mentioned above is not used in the Easter season since it will have already been used at the Easter Vigil.

interrogation of the celebrant in the singular; since sin and faith are basically individual.

At the end of the profession of faith the rest of the congregation also gives its assent, using the formula provided or some other, according to local custom.

BAPTISM

Next follows the actual baptism of the children. The celebrant invites the families one by one. Using the name of the individual child, he questions the parents and godparents. He then baptises the children first addressing them by their baptismal name and then pronouncing the Trinitarian formula. If baptism is by immersion then the celebrant takes the child in his hands and immerses it three times, pronouncing the formula. If it is by pouring, then the father or mother holds the child while the celebrant baptises it. According to custom the god-parent may hold the child instead of the parent.

“In the Latin Church this triple infusion is accompanied by the minister’s words: “N., I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” In the Eastern liturgies the catechumen turns toward the East and the priest says: “The servant of God, N., is baptised in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” At the invocation of each person of the Most Holy Trinity, the priest immerses the candidate in the water and raises him up again.”¹⁷

¹⁷ CCC, no. 1240.

EXPLANATORY RITES

What follows after the baptism are the explanatory rites: they elucidate the full meaning of baptism.

POST-BAPTISMAL ANOINTING

The anointing with Chrism shows how the new Christian assumes the three-fold ministry of Christ: priestly, kingly and prophetic.¹⁸ The priestly ministry gives each member of the faithful a duty to pray and to be an instrument of sanctification for others. The kingly ministry is a ministry of service, after the example of Christ who came not to be served but to serve. The prophetic ministry gives the Christian the duty of witness both by word of mouth and by example.

Having read the formula that explains these three ministries the minister then anoints the children at the crown of the head.¹⁹ The anointing is carried out in silence. If the number of children is large and other priests or deacons are present, these may anoint some of the children with Chrism.

“In the liturgy of the Eastern Churches, the post-baptismal anointing is the sacrament of Chrismation ‘Confirmation’. In the Roman liturgy the post-baptismal anointing announces a second anointing with sacred

¹⁸ *Rite of Baptism for Children* no. 62. Cf. CCC, no. 1241.

¹⁹ It is the practice in many places to anoint on the forehead. Probably this was originally made for practical reasons since on the forehead there is no hair as on the crown of the head. Indeed some vernacular translations require anointing on the forehead. (e.g. the Luganda translation in *Ekitabo ky'Omukristu* says: "Asiiga buli mwaana Chrisma mu kyenyi" p. 703). However, the prescribed practice requires anointing on the crown of the head. The ICEL translation in *The Rites* states: "next, the celebrant anoints each child on the crown of the head with Chrism, in silence." This is the translation of the typical Latin edition which says: "*postea celebrans singulos baptizatos sacro chrismate in vertice capitis linat, nihil dicens.*"

chrism to be conferred later by the bishop - Confirmation, which will as it were 'confirm' and complete the baptismal anointing."²⁰

THE WHITE GARMENT

Next the children are dressed with the white garment. The garment signifies that the child has become a new creation and has clothed itself in Christ. It is the outward sign of its Christian dignity. With the help of the family and friends by word and their example, the child receives the responsibility to bring that dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven. After the words that bring out the symbolism of the garment it is placed on the child by the minister. A different colour is not permitted unless demanded by local custom. Nor should the garment bear decorations or be stained, if it is to have its full symbolism. It is desirable that the families provide the garments. That way the garments have more meaning for them. In the pre-baptismal catechesis parents might be advised to preserve this garment for the children as a reminder of their baptism. It would be beautiful for anyone in later adult life to still have their baptismal garment. On the other hand the celebrant would be well advised to keep a white garment just in case some parent has forgotten or has one that is clearly unsuitable. It is not proper that the celebrant uses a corporal or pulls out the amice from under his alb to serve as the white garment. Nor is it good to use the garment intended for one child on those who do not have their own.

It is not enough that the child is wearing a white dress. Even those wearing white should have a white garment over and above that.

THE LIGHTED CANDLE

Next the celebrant takes the Easter candle and says: "Receive the light of Christ." The father or the mother, or even god-parent lights the child's candle from the Easter candle. When the candles are lit then the celebrant says the words that explain its symbolism. The light which is symbolic of faith in Jesus Christ is entrusted to the parents and god-

²⁰ CCC, no. 1242.

parents to be kept burning bright. They are to strive to see that their children walk always as children of the light, that they keep the flame of faith alive in their hearts, so that when the Lord comes, they may go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.

It is not necessary that the candle is placed in the hands of the child. After all the faith is not entrusted to it, since it is too young to understand. Rather those to whom the faith is entrusted should bear the candle. Moreover, it is easy to be careless and to burn the tender skin of the child with burning wax or the candle itself. Again as with regard to the white garment it would be desirable that the parents bring their own candles and that they preserve them after the baptism. It would be meaningful if in adult life one would renew the baptismal promises on Easter Vigil using his or her baptismal candle, and afterwards preserve it for the next year. For that reason it would be useful to use a sizeable candle at baptism if one desires that his or her child lives for a long time!

EPHPHETHA

The rite of Ephphetha or prayer over ears and mouth is an optional ritual. If the conference of bishops decides to preserve the practice, the rite follows after that of the burning candle. It recalls the deaf and dumb man whose mouth and ears the Lord touched healing him. The mouth and ears are in this case given a spiritual meaning: that the child's ears may be opened to hear and understand the gospel and that it may proclaim to others what it has understood. Where there is a large number of children to be baptised, it may be advisable for hygienic purposes not to carry out this rite, touching the mouth and ears of each child. One may indeed use the words over the children without applying the gesture of touching them.

If baptism is taking place within Mass, after this rite each assumes their places and the Mass continues as usual.

CONCLUSION OF THE RITE

The concluding rite includes the Lord's Prayer and the Blessing. When baptism is conducted within Mass then the Our Father is said at its proper place in the order of Mass. The only thing that changes is its introduction. The Lord who not only taught his disciples to address God as Father also gave them a share in that divine sonship through baptism. and now that there are new members that have just assumed that sonship it is appropriate that something is said to that effect before the recitation of the Lord's prayer. The celebrant substitutes the usual introduction to the our Father with one given in the baptismal rite.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

When baptism is conducted outside Mass the Our Father follows immediately after. There is then a procession to the altar, unless baptism was performed in the sanctuary. The lighted candles are carried for the children. At the altar the celebrant introduces the Our Father.

THE BAPTISMAL BLESSING

Again where baptism is conducted within Mass the special blessing is given in the place of the normal final blessing. The celebrant first blesses the mothers, who hold the children in their arms, then the fathers, and lastly the entire assembly. There is no point in reserving the blessing of the parents only to those who are married in Church. The wording of the blessing does not exclude those who are not married in Church. If a pastor wants to persuade them to embrace Christian marriage it is better for him to find some other means of doing that. Where baptism is conducted outside of Mass (or Communion Service) the blessing follows immediately after the Our Father.

