

St. Mark Seeker's Study Guide

Sacraments and Baptism



SACRAMENT: An efficacious sign of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us by the work of the Holy Spirit (CCC, nos. 1131, 774).

Remember how we talked about God as the ground of being for all Creation? God's grace works through Creation as in water, oil, bread, wine and human bodies.

SACRAMENT OF SALVATION: By God's gracious plan, the Church is a sacrament of salvation, that is, a visible community in and through which Jesus Christ offers salvation through the Seven Sacraments, the preaching of the word, and the spiritual and moral witness of the members of Christ's body.

SACRAMENTAL CHARACTER: An indelible spiritual mark that is the permanent effect of the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders. It brings a new conformity to Christ and a specific standing in the Church. The reception of these Sacraments is never repeated. (cf. CCC, Glossary). United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) (2012-04-02).

SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION: The sacraments of initiation, baptism, confirmation and eucharist, are the means provided by Christ to enter into union with his mystical body, the Church and to enter into the life of grace.

The rite of Baptism at the Easter Vigil

The Blessing of the Water

The Presider blesses the water. When the priest inserts the Easter candle into the font three times, invoking the Divine Trinity, we experience the ritual that announces the meaning of our baptism into these waters - one with Christ in dying that we might be one with him in rising. At our funeral, the priest will say, "In baptism she died with Christ, may she rise with Christ to share in his Resurrection."

The Renunciation of Evil

The catechumens are asked before baptism these three questions, in these or similar words.

- **"Do you reject sin, so as to live in the freedom of God's children?"** When we answer "yes" we still know that we cling to the tendency towards sinful behavior. The next question takes us deeper.
- **"Do you reject the glamor of evil and refuse to be mastered by sin?"** Do you reject the

possibility that sin can make you happy? That rejection requires trust in God and the recognition that turning in on myself only takes me away from God.

- **“Do you reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness?”** Do you reject the power and personality of evil. We reject cooperation with evil, both visible and invisible.

These last renunciations prepare us to confess the faith of the Church.

The Profession of Faith

- **“Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?”**
- **“Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, Our Lord?”**
- **“Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?”**

The profession of faith is a ritual affirmation of the belief in the Nicene Creed

Baptism and the Rites Explaining Baptism.

The candidates are then baptized. They are asked their name and they are baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The ritual of pouring water over the head is meant to be a sign of entry into the death of Christ in order to enter into his resurrection. We should feel the power of this moment and open our hearts to its joy.

Anointing with Oil

The newly baptized are anointed, with the same oil used to anoint priests. “He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation, so that, united with his people, you may remain forever a member of Christ who is Priest, Prophet, and King.”

The newly baptized then receive a candle lit from the Easter fire.

“You have been enlightened by Christ. Walk always as children of the light and keep the flame of faith alive in your hearts. When the Lord comes, may you go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.”

EFFECTS OF BAPTISM

All sins are forgiven, Original Sin and all personal sins, and temporal punishment due to sin is removed by baptism. After one has been reborn in Christ, there is nothing to prevent one’s entry into God’s Kingdom. However, though all sins are removed, there remains, as an effect of Original Sin, the inclination to sin that is called concupiscence. This inclination to sin shows itself in what is sometimes referred to as a darkening of the mind and a weakening of the will, that is, the inability to know clearly the right or wrong of an action and the lack of strength to resist temptation and always to do the right thing no matter how hard this is. The effects of Original Sin need not harm us so long as we seek strength to resist them through the Sacrament of Penance, the Sacrament of the Eucharist, prayer, a deepening spirituality, growth in virtue, and a wholehearted dependence on God. (CCC)

More Questions for Discussion

- 1) Is baptism a sacrament that makes present an invisible reality or is it merely a symbol? Can God work through material reality?
- 2) As part of the ritual of blessing the water for baptism, the priest recalls salvation history. What does baptism have to do with these events in salvation history:
 - a) God separating the water to make space for Creation. Gen. 1
 - b) God sending a flood on the earth but saving Noah and his family. Gen. 6
 - c) God parting the Red Sea so that Moses and the people could pass through? Ex. 14
 - d) Water and blood flowing from the side of Jesus of Nazareth that had been pierced by a spear? John 19
- 3) Through circumcision the men of Israel became part of the people of Israel. There was no similar ritual for women. St. Paul's letter to the Colossians in Chapter 2 states, "*And you have been made complete in Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority. In Him you were also circumcised in the putting off of your sinful nature, with the circumcision performed by Christ and not by human hands. And having been buried with Him in baptism, you were raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead...*"
 - i) What do circumcision and baptism have in common?
 - ii) Why do you think St. Paul, in referring to Christ and baptism, says, "For *all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*" Gal. 3. Has baptism taken the place of Israelite male circumcision, grafting all of God's children into Israel?

GRACE

The help God gives us to respond to our vocation to become his adopted sons and daughters. The divine initiative of grace precedes, prepares, and elicits our free response in faith and commitment. Sanctifying grace is a habitual gift of God's own divine life, a stable and supernatural disposition that enables us to live with God and to act by his love. Actual graces refer to God's interventions in our lives, whether at the beginning of conversion or in the course of the work of sanctification. CCC

ADOPTED CHILDREN OF GOD

Baptism also gives us new life as adopted children of God. We become sharers of divine life and temples of the Holy Spirit. We are now made righteous by God and live in a state of grace, that is, we live in union with God because of his gracious and loving initiative. Our permanence in the state of grace is called sanctifying grace because God "sanctifies" us, that is, makes us his holy people by giving us his life. God continues to assist us by many helps that are called actual graces. Thus, we have the ability to live and act under the guidance and light of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This helps us mature in goodness through the practice of virtues, such as the Cardinal Virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. (CCC)