

SYMBOLON: LIVING THE FAITH SESSION 1: THE SACRAMENTS: BAPTISM & CONFIRMATION

ADULT CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH CHAPTERS 15 AND 16

LESSON OUTLINE

We have now completed the Creed and are beginning the second Pillar of the Catholic Faith – the Sacraments.

What is a Sacrament?

A Sacrament is an action of the Church in which Christ Himself is working. Sacraments are the ways which the work of Christ continues on earth to this very day. Sacraments are:

1. visible signs
2. instituted by Christ
3. to convey grace.

Remember when we talked about the Catholic Church? Why do we need the Church, what are the 4 marks of the Church? The Church is the instrument of salvation and has been entrusted by Christ with the sacraments.

Grace is the life and strength of God poured into us which enables us to live the new life won for us by Jesus.

There are seven Sacraments:

1. Baptism
2. Confirmation
3. Eucharist
4. Confession
5. Anointing of the Sick
6. Matrimony
7. Holy Orders

The first three are called Sacraments of Initiation, because they are necessary to be fully initiated into the Catholic Church. Confession and Anointing are called Sacraments of Healing, because they restore spiritual and physical health. The last two are vocations (callings) to married life or the priesthood (or permanent diaconate). In the next lessons will explore each of these Sacraments separately.

Baptism

As you learn about baptism, remember that each of you have been baptized – each of you have received these gifts and God's sanctifying grace and each of you have also been called to mission.

The first Sacrament to be received is Baptism. It is performed by the pouring of water over a person, while saying, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." If any other words are substituted, the Baptism is not valid. Normally a priest or deacon administers Baptism. But in an emergency, in danger of death, anyone may baptize if a priest or deacon is not available.

What happens at Baptism? As with all Sacraments, earthly elements are used to symbolize invisible heavenly realities. The water is a visible symbol of the Holy Spirit, who invisibly comes down upon the person being baptized. The name of God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is imprinted on the soul. The person is born again, not in the flesh, but of the Holy Spirit, for eternal life. All sin is washed away. The person dies with Christ and rises to new life with Him. Before the pouring of the water, the person is anointed with blessed oil, called the oil of catechumens, or the oil of exorcism. This does not mean the person is possessed, but it is an indication to the devil that he is to have no power over this person who now belongs to Christ. After the pouring of the water, the person is anointed with an aromatic oil, called chrism. This indicates that the newly baptized person shares the whole life and work of Christ as prophet, priest, and king.

Baptism comes from the Greek word which means “to wash or immerse.” In the Old Testament, male children were circumcised eight days after birth to show they were God’s people. Now that Jesus has come, we are made God’s people through Baptism. Most Baptismal fonts have eight sides, which symbolizes the eighth day of Creation...a day without end, so that by being baptized we enter eternity with God! This is what St. Paul says about Baptism in Colossians 2:11-12: In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh[a] was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. In the early Church this was a question: whether non Jews, gentiles, had to be circumcised in order to become Christian. In other words did they have to follow the old law? The Jewish Christian leaders of the early Church at the Council of Jerusalem rejected circumcision as a requirement for Gentile converts. (Acts 15) Remember the purpose of the Law that God gave the Jews.... And that Christ himself is the fulfillment of the Law.

After Baptism, even though the guilt of sin is washed away, the tendency to sin remains. This tendency toward sin is called “concupiscence,” and because of it, the Christian is engaged in daily struggle to avoid sin and to live a virtuous life. But we do not – in fact cannot – overcome concupiscence on our own. We need God’s help: His grace. Baptism, as do all the Sacraments, gives us the grace – the power – of God to enable us to overcome temptation and avoid sin.

Why do we baptize infants? They have not sinned, have they? Infants have committed no actual or personal sins, but they have inherited from their parents what is called “original sin.” Original sin refers to the sin of disobedience committed by Adam and Eve, which brought upon them and their children the curse of death, and separated them from God. We know that infants have inherited this sin because they are susceptible to death. In Baptism they are born anew as God’s children in Christ.

But infants do not know what is happening to them; how can Baptism do them any good? For many Protestants, Baptism is something we do for God, to show our commitment to Him. But such theology is backwards. Baptism is not our work for God; it is instead something God is doing to us: it is the life of Jesus being applied to us, poured into us. It is important that parents and sponsors (godparents) make certain that as the child grows he is instructed about what happened to him at Baptism, and taught to live the Christian life of faith. Only then can Baptism reach maturity.