



Sacraments 5/35: The Essentials of Baptism

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| 1) a not-already Baptized person, | 2) water, |
| 3) the person intending to do the Baptism | 4) the correct words. |

These words and intention are known as the “form” (formula/shape) of the Sacrament. The “matter” (material) is the not-already Baptized person and water. The water, not cola or juice, should be clean and clear. The Form of Baptism is to either immerse (dunk) the person in water or to pour water over their head. The dunking and pouring can be just once as the words are said, or three times for the Trinity. The words said are: “*Name*, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” If we are not sure if the person has been previously / validly Baptized or not, we can do a “conditional” Baptism. In this case, we begin the formula with the added words: “if you have not already been baptized, then I baptize you . . .” We are particular about this because we never “re-baptize.” If the person was only “dedicated” in the “name of Jesus,” we would not recognize that as a valid Baptism. It must be Trinitarian.

These are the essentials. However, we do not want to just settle for the minimum required. The other parts of the Rite of Baptism help flesh out the meaning of what we are doing. In an emergency situation, such as a baby in danger soon after birth, one would only need to do the essentials of the Rite and the baby would be validly baptized. Once the child is healthy and stable, we would welcome them to the Church and “complete the Rites.” We would not “re-baptize” the child, but would go through all of the other rituals of Baptism. These include the prayer of Exorcism (yes, we do an exorcism in each Baptism), the anointing with the oil of the Catechumenate, the anointing with Chrism, the clothing with the white garment, and the lighting of the baptismal candle. While not essential, these all help those present understand better what we are doing and the meaning of the Baptism.

Who can perform a Baptism? The ordinary minister of Baptism is a deacon, priest, or bishop. Ideally, it should be the pastor, but can be the associate, or, outside of Mass, a deacon. However, in emergency situations, *anyone* can baptize. Even a *non*-baptized person themselves can baptize someone in an emergency. They must say the correct words, use water, and have the true intention to perform a Baptism. This is only in absolute life or death emergencies. In the Middle Ages, we can read tales of “partial-birth Baptisms.” So high was the infant mortality rate that, as soon as the baby’s head came out, the midwife would sometimes Baptize the child on the head to avoid the danger of waiting too long. With medical advances, we have a better chance today.

Rules for Godparents. They must be 1) fully initiated into the Catholic Church, 2) if married, the union must be valid in the Catholic Church, and 3) a regular participant in the life of the Church. Full initiation (1) means that they themselves have already been Baptized, Confirmed, and received the Eucharist. People whose marriages (2) are invalid in the Catholic Church cannot stand as Godparents. Regular participation (3) in the life of the Church means at least that they go to Catholic Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation. If you never or rarely go to Mass, you cannot be a Godparent. These are not just social positions; they come with obligations to help raise this child in the faith. If a person is not practicing the faith, they are not a good role model *for* the faith. Any Baptized, but not Catholic, person, while not able to be the valid Godparent, can be invited to be a Christian Witness at a Baptism. If there are two Godparents, they are to be a male and a female. At least one needs to be the valid Godparent.

-Fr. Kopp

Next Week: Tri-Partite of Baptism