



Sacraments 6/35: The Tri-Partite of Baptism

Sacramentum Tantum What the Sacramental Rite itself looks like.

This includes the essentials of the rite that we talked about previously: The washing with water, the proper words to say, the ministers, etc.

Res Tantum What the immediate result of the Sacrament is, the grace given and its ultimate meaning.

The result of Baptism is that, in it, we are washed free from original sin. Here again we see the grace of the sacrament building on the natural meaning of the action. Water washes dirt away and we are clean. Baptism washes sin away and we are clean. It is the first step on the journey towards Heaven. Because of Baptism, we are then able to receive the other sacraments. Theologically, then, if an unbaptized person receives the Eucharist, they are receiving only the *Sacramentum Tantum*. They are not receiving the sanctifying grace of the Eucharist because they have not yet received the grace of Baptism. The same is true for those in a state of sin who receive the Eucharist.

Res et Sacramentum What the abiding, everlasting purpose of the Sacrament is.

Baptism is one of three Sacraments (along with Confirmation and Holy Orders) that leave a permanent “character.” The “character” of Baptism is the incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Seal of the Trinity on our soul. The character of a Sacrament can never be washed away. This is why the three character Sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders) can never be repeated. In the Creed, we state that we “believe in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.” If someone stops practicing the faith or falls through sin, they are blocked from receiving the ongoing grace of the Sacrament of Baptism. They have placed an *obex*, an “obstacle”, in the path of the *Res Tantum*. Yet the character, the *Res et Sacramentum*, remains. After reconciliation, the *obex* is removed and the grace continues to flow, but we would not “re-baptize.” St. Augustine, who was the first theologian to hint at a “third” part to the nature of Sacraments, was first aware of this third part because of his understanding of Baptism. He explained the unrepeatable character of Baptism in terms of a military tattoo. When a person joined the Roman Army, they were tattooed with the SPQR of the Empire. If they deserted, they were no longer an active part of the Army and blocked from all its benefits. If they then rejoined, they were not retattooed; the tattoo remains. The character of Baptism, our eternal incorporation into the Body of Christ, can never be removed; but we can put obstacles in the path of grace (the *Res Tantum*).

-Fr. Kopp

Next Week: The Difference Between the Catholic and Protestant View of Baptism