



**The lighted candle:** This rite has been in use for eight hundred years. The candle, lit from the Paschal candle, represents the light of Christ, the faith. It is recalled in various other uses of candles in the Church's liturgy. Parents and godparents are reminded of their duty to guard this faith for their children so that they will "walk always as children of the light". The candle should be retained for use later at important occasions in the child's life.

**Ephphetha:** This rite which recalled the curing of the deaf and dumb man (Mark 7:32-35) reminds the Christian of his duty to listen to the word of God and to witness to it be what one says and does.

**Procession to the altar:** Baptism is the first step in the process by which a person is initiated into the eucharistic community. The child is now carried to the altar where later he will share in the eucharistic banquet. The rite ought to remind parents that their work has but begun.

**The "Our Father" :** In the words of the "Our Father" the community now proclaims its gratitude for the sanctification of the child, now a child of God.

**Blessings:** The priest blesses the mother first, praying that one day she and her child will thank God in heaven; then the father, and finally the entire assembly.



## THE SACRAMENT OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION

### INFANT BAPTISM



Baptism is an initiation into the Christian community and an incorporation into Christ. The faith of the Christian is a communal faith and salvation is achieved by membership of the community of faith. The Christian is incorporated into the Body of Christ and especially into his death and resurrection. A Christian is a member of the priestly, prophetic and royal People of God and shares the three-fold mission of Christ. The Spirit is bestowed on the Christian so that Christ might carry out his mission through the witness of the baptised.

**Assembling of the community:** The new Order of Baptism envisages the participation of the parishioners. Why? Because the initiation of a new member into their community is their concern. To him they owe their interest, their love and their help. But more, they will find the celebration a moving meditation on what it means to be a Christian.

**Initial dialogue:** The opening dialogue sounds a note which will recur throughout the ceremony: the responsibility of the parents towards their child. Here they declare publicly that they clearly understand their responsibility.

**Godparents' role:** These are the Church's official representatives at the celebration. They are responsible, with the parents, for the religious formation of the child. They profess publicly that they are ready to help the parents in this task.

**Sign of the cross:** The tracing of the Christian mark, the cross, on the child's forehead indicates that the child is being claimed for Christ. The parents in turn trace the cross on their child, thereby adding their approval to what is taking place.



**Liturgy of the Word:** Before the conferring of the sacrament it is important that those present should be prepared so that they will welcome with faith the action of the Spirit. Hence this celebration of the Word which is directed towards "stirring up the faith of parents, godparents and congregation".

**Homily:** After the readings the celebrant gives a short homily, explaining the significance of what has been read. His purpose will be to lead the people to a deeper understanding of the mystery of baptism, and to encourage parents and godparents to a willing acceptance of their responsibilities. Suitable themes include baptism as the sacrament of faith, baptism as a transition from death to life with Christ; baptism as incorporation into the community; the baptismal call to holiness and to the apostolate; the priesthood of the faithful; the responsibilities of parents and godparents.

**Prayers of the Faithful:** Here the various aspirations and themes which occur throughout the ceremony are channelled into prayer.

**Exorcism and Anointing:** In olden times athletes were anointed, that is, smeared with oil before a combat. So too the Christian at baptism: he is anointed for the combat against the evil one. Even though he has passed through baptism, into the marvellous light of Christ, nevertheless the kingdom of darkness will continue to lure him. Hence this prayer, and the anointing which symbolises the strengthening of the Christian for his lifelong combat.



**Blessing of the Water:** This takes place at each celebration of baptism - except during the Easter season when water blessed at the Easter Vigil is used. Here the imagery and symbolism of the sacrament reach a powerful highpoint, bringing out how through the use of water throughout salvation history God prepared his people for Christian baptism. The Spirit which hovered over the waters at creation prepared for the Spirit which would give new life at the new creation in baptism. The destroying waters of the flood prepared for the

sin-destroying waters of baptism. The waters of the Red Sea through which the Israelites passed in their liberation from the Egyptians prepared for the waters through which the Christian would pass in his liberation from the slavery of sin. The waters of baptism recall too the water which flowed from Christ's side on the cross. They recall the waters of the Jordan where Jesus was baptised by John. Finally, the natural cleansing quality of water suggests the power of baptism to cleanse from sin.

**Renunciation of Sin & Profession of Faith:** Parents and godparents have the duty to watch that the divine life that the child is about to receive is "kept safe from the poison of sin" and grows always stronger. Here, therefore, they are called upon to renew their own rejection of sin and profess their faith. Publicly they declare that they wish to have their child baptised into the same faith.

**Baptism:** The new ritual shows a preference for the method of immersion, which is "more suitable as a symbol of participation in the death and resurrection of Christ". The ancient baptistries were real pools of flowing water into which the candidate was immersed. The "font" of the future may take several forms: it may for instance be a bowl or, as in the ancient past, a pool with still or running water.



**Anointing with Chrism:** This rite gives expression to a key doctrine of Vatican II - the priesthood of the faithful. The Christian through baptism becomes one of a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (1 Pet. 2:9). The anointing with chrism symbolises this sharing of the Christian in the anointing and priesthood of Christ.

**The Clothing with the White Garment:** This ancient practice recalls Paul's words: "As many of you were baptised into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). The clothing symbolises the robing of the Christians in glory, the glory of the resurrection. The white garment is a symbol of his newly-acquired dignity, a dignity which he should bring unstained into the everlasting life of heaven. In ancient times the neophyte wore the garment during the eight days which followed his baptism.