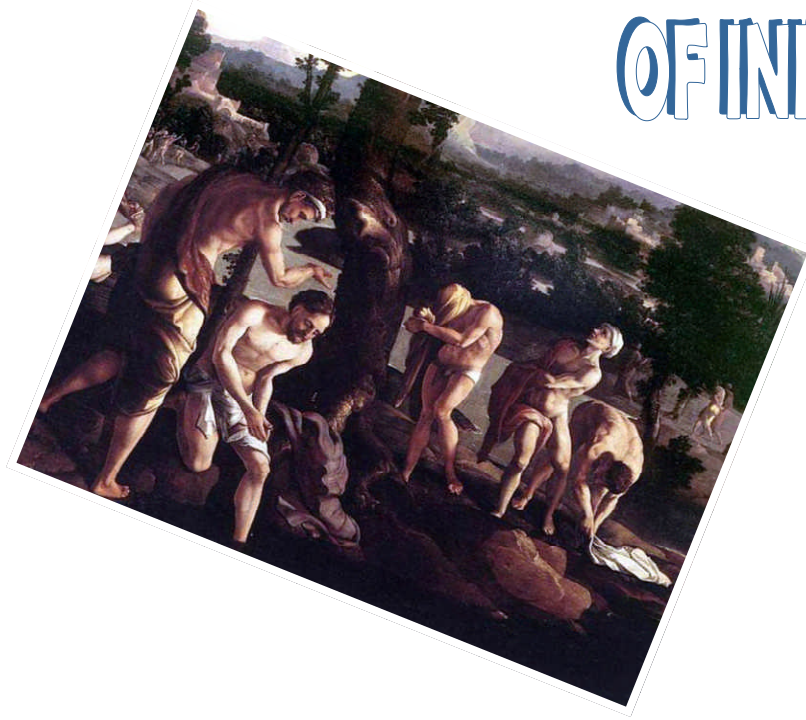


UNPACKING THE EMMAUS SERIES

**THE SACRAMENTS
OF INITIATION**



*Written by John Thornhill SM
Designed and produced by Patrick Lim*

THE EMMAUS SERIES



Questions Catholics ask on their journey of Faith

SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION

This booklet can be used by families preparing their children for baptism. In this case, the pastoral leader assisting them in this important commitment can make creative use of the material in this booklet.

ONE SESSION ONLY

Questions for reflection and discussion

Spend some time selecting the appropriate responses and discuss them with those in the group.

Why do Catholics today request baptism for their children?

- ◆ It's the right thing to do.
- ◆ Want their child to be a child of God.
- ◆ Their parents want them to have the child baptised.
- ◆ Want their child to have a Christian way of life.
- ◆ Want their child to go to a Catholic school.

What does faith mean in our lives?

- ◆ Belonging to a religion.
- ◆ Believing what God has revealed.
- ◆ Having a relationship with God.

What is the role of Godparents?

- ◆ It's a tradition in the Catholic Church
- ◆ Practicing Catholics who take part to represent the larger community of the Church.
- ◆ One or two people who will help parents encourage the child to live a Catholic life.

What should Baptism mean for Christians?

Viewing of DVD (Part 1)

- ◆ The Big Picture: The Challenge of Christian Faith

Sharing of reactions to the presentation

Groups have a Buzz Session – in the spirit of Sympathetic Listening described in the booklet, 'Getting Started' pp.14-15 – sharing immediate reactions to the presentation:

Question

- ◆ What has struck you as enlightening, inspiring, or even puzzling?

Reading and reflection

Looking at the Symbols used in the Ceremony of Baptism

Water

- ◆ This is a sign of cleansing, it is a sign that we are cleansed from our human sinfulness living in the new life of Christ. Water is necessary for life and so is a sign too that the life of the risen Christ is ours.

Oil

- ◆ The oil of Baptism is olive oil. Oil softens, shines, makes translucent. It is a sign of health and strength. It can be fuel for fire, for energy and for light.

Lighted Candle

- ◆ It symbolizes Jesus – the light of the World. Fire warms us, cooks our food. Fire can be a beacon to others – it protects us from danger in the dark. The flame reminds us to follow Jesus and to let our love glow so that others will join us in celebrating his love.

White Garment

- ◆ This is a symbol of new life and innocence. The garment is a sign to all that the person is clothed in Christ.

Sign of the Cross

- ◆ It is a sign of ownership. The sign of the cross is the mark of Christians that represents the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. The celebrant, parents and godparents trace it on the child's forehead to show that the child belongs to Jesus, who now offers His help and grace to face and overcome the challenges of life.

What is the place of symbols in Sacramental rituals?

- ◆ The things of nature that have a symbolic place in the ceremony of baptism remind us that God's creation speaks to us in a way that mere words cannot easily capture. Symbols give expression to the meaning in life that cannot be expressed in ordinary language.

Viewing of DVD (Part 2)

- ◆ The Three Sacraments of Initiation

Sharing of reactions to the presentation

Groups have a Buzz Session – in the spirit of Sympathetic Listening described in the booklet, 'Getting Started' pp. 14-15 – sharing immediate reactions to the presentation:

Question

- ◆ What has struck you as enlightening, inspiring, or even puzzling?

Readings for reflection and discussion

There are 3 readings provided. Groups may select one or more of these according to the group makeup.

READING 1

Suitable for families having their children baptised

Nourishing the gift of Faith

The early years of a child's life have effects which last throughout life. In a healthy interaction between Parent and Child, the child develops a sense of his or her own worth and goodness, and a sense of trust in other people. This is important for the child's faith – a child that is loved and cared for is better able to believe in a God who is Love Itself.

A healthy interaction is expressed in family life in very ordinary ways: sharing meals happily together; reading stories; playing games; sharing in jobs like cleaning up. Through these things children develop healthy attitudes that will shape their personalities in later life. Parents should remember that, in their dealings with their children in the course of the day, they reflect values which are coloured by their own relationship with God. As the old saying goes: 'Faith is caught, not taught'. It is in the ordinary events of daily living that parents can - informally and naturally – foster their children's faith.

Faith is more than 'saying prayers'. It is a gift from God. And life experiences help or hinder our response to this gift. Sharing faith should not be difficult. Children are open to a meeting with God – because they are in touch with the wonder of God's world.

Being a Christian is a community experience; the child first learns the meaning of community in the shelter and love of his or her own family. Healthy families develop an atmosphere that encourages peacemaking, when disagreements occur. They help children understand that reconciliation and forgiveness are a part of living.

What really matters in life is found in the sharing that makes community. Showing your children how to join in the life of the community of God's Church is one of the greatest gifts you can give them. There they will find what can fill their lives with meaning and hope. □

Question

- ◆ What stands out for you in this reading on healthy family life?

READING 2

Suitable for general and RCIA groups

Questions Catholics Ask in a Time of Change

by John Thornhill sm (2001, pp.89-91)

Even for us as individuals, *words* and *gestures* are essential to our communicating with each other as human beings. When a toddler falls over, it is not enough to tell it we love it: we pick it up and give it a comforting cuddle. At a more general level, we recognise that the way of life that we share is handed on through *words* (in stories, teachings and literature in all its forms) and the *actions of rituals* (the acting out of important moments of our life together). It is not surprising, therefore, that God makes use of this twofold pattern in the life of the Church.

We live in a culture which is impatient with empty formalities. Properly understood and enacted, however, the Church's ceremonies are anything but empty formalities. They give expression to the twofold pattern we have referred to, which is basic to our being human. The challenge the Christian community must take up is making them come alive for those who are participating. We call our Church assemblies 'celebrations' – though the all-too-serious, no-smiles mood which we have come to take for granted in Church sometimes makes them seem anything but! Reflecting on the meaning of 'celebration' can help us find a fuller and more joyful appreciation of the Church's sacraments.

Some events and moments are far too significant to be allowed to pass without being consciously owned and entered into. The rituals and ceremonies associated with human celebrations are designed to help those taking part to *own* the moment and the joy which it can bring. In the Church's celebrations we own the realities of faith - through our ceremonial reading of the Scriptures, and through our joining in the ritual of the sacramental mysteries, in which God continues to be active in our lives.

What do we *own* in our sacramental celebrations? We own the Saviour's *Paschal Mystery* – the final achievement of God's plan for the whole of creation, in the death and resurrection triumph of Jesus: an event that came to pass *that we may share in it*.

It is enlightening and inspiring to follow the thought of St Paul, as he came to recognise what Christian faith owns in the celebration of the sacraments. Paul probably began to recognise the *solidarity believers have with Christ*, as he struggled to understand the words he had heard on the road to Damascus, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting' (Acts 9:5). The great plan of God, a theme very familiar to Paul from the Scriptures, had been fulfilled in a way which overturned all his expectations. He came to see the Church's new existence in solidarity with the risen Lord as a startling revelation: God 'has made known to us the mystery of his will ... set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth' (Ephesians 1: 9-10).

Paul soon came to recognise the part played by the two great Christian sacraments

in our sharing in what God has achieved in Christ's resurrection triumph. Converted to Christian faith by his mysterious meeting with the crucified Jesus, he was received into the community of believers by being immediately baptised (Acts 9:18); and he expressed his new-found fellowship by sharing in the eucharistic 'breaking of bread' (cf. Acts 2:41-42). ◇

Question

- ◆ Does this reading help you to understand the importance of the Sacraments in our Catholic life?

READING 3

Suitable for general and RCIA groups

**Baptism is a sacrament
which brings us into the reign of God**

*From **In His Light: A Path into Catholic Belief**
by William Anderson*

When Jesus began his mission, he proclaimed, 'The reign of God is at hand! Reform your lives and believe in the Gospel' (Mark 1:15). With the coming of Jesus and his death, resurrection, and ascension, the reign of God became a living reality on earth. The people of the Old Testament saw God as reigning over all, but, with Jesus, this reign entered the world in a new way. Through union with Jesus, a person enters the reign of God.

When Nicodemus, a Pharisee, sought instruction from Jesus during the secret hours of the night, Jesus told him, 'I solemnly assure you, no one can see the reign of God unless he is begotten from above' (John 3:3). Nicodemus asked if a person could then enter his mother's womb and be born again, but Jesus explained this new birth into God's reign in a special way. Jesus told him, 'I solemnly assure you, no one can enter into God's kingdom without being begotten of water and Spirit' (John 3:5). In these words, Jesus is not speaking of life hereafter, but he is speaking of the reign of God which is existing on earth and which will reach its fulfilment in eternity. Unless a person is born of water and the Spirit, he or she does not enter this special union with Christ, known as the reign of God even on earth.

Although the Church reveals the presence of the reign of God on earth in a visible way, we cannot say that the Church and the reign of God are one and the same. The Church belongs to the reign of God on earth, but the Church does not exhaust the total meaning of the reign of God. Through baptism, a person not only enters the Church, but also the reign of God which is 'at hand'. Through their lives, baptized Christians have a special part to play in making the reign of God a continual, living reality on earth. □

Question

- ◆ Does this reading give you a greater appreciation on the effects of the Baptism in our lives?

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION

This presentation aims to help parents who request baptism for their children – especially those who no longer take part in Catholic practice – to reflect upon what is implied in their request, and the responsibilities involved.

In the first part, we look at the 'big picture'. What do Christians believe? From the first, Christians have believed that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ brought a turning point in the history of humanity. Jesus foretold that when he was raised up on the cross he would draw all things to himself – transforming the dynamism of creation and opening the way to a sharing with God in eternal life. According to the official Catholic teaching, this great turning point benefits all people of good will. Members of the Church, however, are privileged: as conscious sharers in what God has done for the world in Christ – through the story of the Scriptures, through rituals of the Church, and through a living relationship with Christ as they make their journey of life. Baptism is the basic ritual through which, by the power of God's Spirit, Christians are united to Christ. The Eucharist, the shared sacred meal which Christ gave as a parting gift to his followers - uniting them to what God had done for the world in his death and resurrection - is the central ritual of the Church's life.

Clearly, becoming a member of the Church through Baptism should be the beginning of the child's Christian life. In the baptismal ceremony, parents and godparents are asked whether they are prepared to assume responsibility for fostering the Catholic life of their child. The response they will give should be carefully considered beforehand.

The second part of the presentation looks at ritual initiation as it was practiced in the early Christian centuries. As those being received into the Christian community were adults for the most part, a long period of serious preparation was involved. They were supported, during their preparation, by the whole community. This preparation came to a dramatic climax on the night before Easter Sunday, when they were baptised and confirmed, and then joined the community for the first time in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Much of the seriousness of initiation was obscured in later centuries when most of the baptised were newborn infants. Today the Church seeks to reemphasise this seriousness through a greater involvement of parents in preparation for Baptism.

The decision families face in presenting their children for Baptism should not be taken lightly. If it is taken seriously, however, it will never be regretted, and may open a new chapter in the life of the family. ◇

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