



**Baptism** is the first of seven sacraments that a person receives in the Catholic Church, and the way in which a person becomes a member of the Catholic Church.

## Who can receive a Catholic baptism?

Anyone who has not already been baptised can receive the sacrament of Baptism in the Catholic Church. Baptism leaves an *indelible* (permanent) mark on the soul and there is no way nor any reason that one could be re-baptised.

There are no age restrictions for baptism; you cannot be too old or too young to be baptised.



## Who can perform a Catholic baptism?

Anyone can perform a baptism, however this is typically done only in extreme cases in which someone's life is in danger. The Catholic Church has *ordinary ministers* for sacraments and those are bishops, priests and deacons.

In the Catholic Church today, people are usually baptised as infants by a priest or deacon, who will apply the Trinitarian Baptismal formula.

The Trinitarian formula is:

I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

## Does the Catholic Church accept baptisms from another church?

Yes, the Catholic Church recognises any baptism that uses water and in which the person baptised was baptised with the Trinitarian formula. Some churches do not use the Trinitarian formula for baptism and thus their baptisms are not valid.

Baptism is a gift from God to humanity. Baptism initiates us into the family of God and cleanses us of sin. We do not need to earn this gift. God gives it freely to all who are open to it. For someone who is baptised as an infant, the personal response of faith comes as the child grows to respond to the graces given in baptism.

Baptism is connected to faith, and this connection is not lost when an infant is baptised. The *Apostolic Tradition* (usually attributed to St. Hippolytus) was written in the early third century. It states:

Baptise first the children, and if they can speak for themselves let them do so. Otherwise, let their parents or other relatives speak for them.

Today, the Church still recognises the connection between faith and baptism. When a child is baptised, the parents' faith speaks for the child who is too young to have explicit faith on his or her own. This is why the Church requires a reasonable hope that the parents will raise the child in the Catholic faith before a child is baptised.

## **What does the Grace of Baptism accomplish?**

Baptism does five things specifically.

1. It forgives all sins that may have been committed prior to a person's baptism including original sin, mortal sins, and venial sins, and it relieves the punishment for those sins.
2. It makes the newly baptised person "a new creature."
3. It turns the person into a newly adopted son of God and a member of Christ. Baptism incorporates a person into the Church, which is the body of Christ.
4. It brings someone into the flock of the faithful and brings them to share in the royal priesthood of Christ (1 Pet. 2:9-10). Catholic baptism gives a share in the common priesthood of all believers and it also brings about the sacramental bond of the unity of Christians.
5. Last, but certainly not least, baptism leaves an indelible spiritual mark (character) of belonging to Christ on the soul. Nothing you can do will take away this mark even if you sin a million times. Those sins may prevent you from being open to the salvation God offers through baptism, but you will always carry the mark of a Christian on your soul, therefore making re-baptism impossible.

## **What is the form and matter of Baptism?**

The *form* of a sacrament is the words that are said when performing or receiving the sacrament. In the case of Baptism this would be, "I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The *matter* of a sacrament is the physical signs that are used. In the case of baptism, water is the matter of the sacrament.

## **What is the role of Godparents?**

Godparents for Catholic Baptism are like sponsors for Confirmation. However, they take on a different role since usually only children have godparents for baptism. Their role is to take over or assist in the faith development of the person being baptised. This is especially important in the event that the parents cannot or do not adequately raise their children in the faith. Godparents can also be helpful through their prayers and example even if the child's parents fulfil their own promise to raise the child in the faith. Therefore, the faith of the Godparents is important in fulfilling the baptismal promise of being raised in the Catholic faith.

