

# Why are babies baptized during Mass?

Kristopher Seaman



It was once quite common to baptize infants during a Liturgy of the Word on a Sunday afternoon or on a weekday apart from the regular Sunday eucharistic liturgy. Perhaps only the priest and a few family members with the godparents were present. One had the sense this was a family celebration, with little connection to the larger Church community of the parish. Today, many parish communities celebrate infant Baptisms within the Sunday eucharistic liturgy. Why?

First, sacraments are communal events. They are neither private moments nor individual celebrations. Sacraments are celebrations of and by the Church. Thus, sacraments are communal events that take place within the community of the Church. In particular, the sacrament of Baptism changes the status of the one being baptized. Generally speaking, Baptism has a twofold meaning. First, the Church believes that original sin is removed through the cleansing waters of new life. Second, one emerges from the font born into a twofold relationship with the Church and with the Trinitarian God. In Baptism, one “puts on” Christ and is hence called a *Christian*. Saint Augustine said Baptism makes one a “little Christ”—a Christian. The candidate for Baptism is immersed three times (for each member of the Trinity) while the presider proclaims, “[Name], I baptize you in the name of the

Father [dip into water or water poured over the head], and of the Son [dip/pour] and of the Holy Spirit [dip/pour].” The newly baptized is in communion, in union, in relationship with the Trinitarian God, as well as with the Church.

Celebrating Baptism during Sunday eucharistic liturgies heightens the rich theology of the Rite of Baptism. The baby is being incorporated (from the Latin *corpus*, meaning “body”) into the body of Christ—the Church that is in communion/union/relationship with the God of Jesus Christ. Sunday Eucharist is the primary event that the Church community gathers to hear God’s Word and to give praise and thanksgiving over Christ who becomes tangible in the very gifts of his Body and Blood. Sunday Eucharist is the repeatable sacrament of initiation. It is in this sacramental event that the community renews its membership—its identity—in Word and Eucharist. In Baptism one is given a new identity or status of Christian, and this status or identity is renewed in Sunday Eucharist. Therefore, celebrating Baptisms of babies during Sunday Eucharist signifies that baptism is incorporating the baby into both the Church and the life of Christ. The celebration is not minimal, but an event of the local Church community surrounding, praying over, and welcoming the baby into the Church and into the life of the God of Jesus Christ.

Another reason for celebrating Baptisms of infants during Sunday Eucharist is based in the ritual text itself. Not just the parents and godparents have responsibility for the new member of the Church, the infant, all the members of the Church have “an important part to play in the baptism of the child” (*Rite of Baptism of Children*, 4). The “faith in which the children are baptized is not the private possession of the individual family, but the common treasure of the whole Church of Christ” (#4). The community is present to help, support, pray, and nurture the faith of the child as he or she grows in communion with Jesus Christ and the Church itself. One comment I hear from godparents and parents who have had their child baptized during Sunday Eucharist is their appreciation of the community who joyfully sings “alleluia” following the Baptism. Parents and godparents have a sense that this child will be nurtured and supported in the faith as he or she grows in the life of Christ. ♦

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## A New *Order of Baptism of Children* to be Introduced in 2020

The very first liturgical text released after the Second Vatican Council was (what became called here in the USA) the *Rite of Baptism*. This text was issued even before the first edition of the *Roman Missal* (which was to be used for the celebration of the "New" Mass). It was promulgated by Pope Paul VI on September 8, 1969 – the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. However, it was not until August 29, 1973 that the English translation of this baptismal ritual was available for use in the USA. This rite is what we have used here in the Diocese of Saginaw ever since.

On Sunday, February 4, 2020, parishes from dioceses across the USA will be introduced to a new edition for the celebration of baptism called the *Order of Baptism of Children [OBC]* (replacing the rite we are familiar with ever since 1973). This is now the "ordinary" rite for baptism of infants and children and mandatory usage is Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020.

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*Dear parents and godparents: Your family has experienced great joy at the birth of your child, and the Church shares your happiness."*

– Order of Baptism of Children (OBC), "Rite of Receiving the Child"

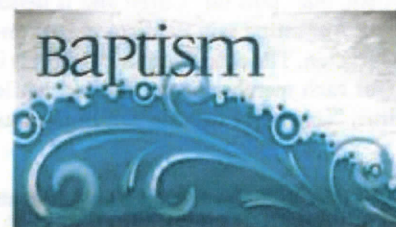
The Diocese of Saginaw has been engaged in presenting several formation sessions to pastoral leaders in the five territorial Vicariates. The task of these sessions was to introduce priests, deacons and directors of parish life to the new baptismal ritual – primarily highlighting changes in any of the ritual configurations, ritual adaptations unique to the celebration of the rite in the USA, and the new translations of the text (to now match that of the *Roman Missal* – 3<sup>rd</sup> Typical Edition). Portions of the new translation within the *OBC* resonate with what already exists in the liturgical rubrics and texts in "The Easter Vigil in the Holy Night" (Easter Vigil) from the *Roman Missal*. Of special note is the inclusion of the *OBC* within Mass. Considerable time

was dedicated in each of the formation sessions to the outline and order of Baptism within Mass (given the reality that, prior to this new *OBC*, there was not any detailed framework for doing so in the present baptismal ritual).

Some of the changes we can anticipate will be:

- † The "Rite of Receiving the Child/ren" – which will include the location, greeting, instruction to and questioning of the parents and godparents, the signing with the Sign of the Cross and the procession to the altar;
- † The availability of a new prayer text of thanksgiving for the waters already blessed in the baptismal font;
- † The new translations of the various "Explanatory Rites" which includes the Anointing after Baptism, Clothing with the White Garment, Handing On of a Lighted Candle, and the optional *Ephphatha* ("Be Opened") – and are all done together, immediately after the immersion or the pouring of the Holy Water; and
- † A variety of new texts for acclamations to accompany each of the various ritual actions of the baptism.

With the reminder and encouragement of Bishop Gruss at a recent gathering of pastoral leaders, it is preferential that the Sacrament of Baptism be celebrated within the gathering of the parish community also celebrating the Vigil, Sunday or Holy Day Masses. This not only expresses the reality that sacraments are not private actions – they are communal actions and rightfully belong to all of the Church. Obviously, there will be some pastoral situations whereby the baptism of a child may be celebrated at another time other than the Vigil, Sunday or Holy Day Mass; however, this should be the exception rather than the rule.



Catholic Diocese of Saginaw + Office of Liturgy