

Baptism as the Gateway to Holy Communion



**EXPLORING
BAPTISMAL
THEOLOGY**

WHAT IS BAPTISM

Exploring our Roots

The word "baptism" is derived from a Greek verb which translates to mean "to dip," "to wash," or "to plunge." It should, therefore, come as no surprise that the outward sign of the Sacrament of Baptism is the cleansing or bathing of the candidate with water. Christians were, however, not the first to make use of purificatory rites of this nature. Having been nurtured in the cradle of Judaism, there is clear evidence of such practices being part of the pre-Christian Jewish community of faith.



Washing has become the primary symbol in the Christian understanding of Baptism. The metaphor of washing has never exhausted all the teaching on Baptism, but only one feature of a much richer set of images. In this regard, it is interesting to note that there are some Christians who have become almost totally preoccupied with "the water bath," its quantity and its location. For some of our new churches, Baptism away from the river, sea, or pool, is no baptism at all.

OLD TESTAMENT UNDERSTANDING OF BAPTISM

Jewish Antecedents to Christian practices and beliefs

Since the Christian faith was nurtured in the cradle of the Jewish faith, note must be taken of the fact that there are Jewish antecedents to many of the central Christian practices and beliefs, including Baptism, even though they take on new meanings and interpretations for the Christian community.

Old Testament Judaism: The Foundation of Sacramental Theology

Some writers trace the roots of the Christian understanding of sacraments back to prophetic symbolism and the use of acts and objects for encountering God, as portrayed in the Old Testament. In so doing, a fundamental principle in understanding the sacraments (sacramental theology) is brought to the fore, namely, the fact that the material can affect the spiritual. In this regard, the Jewish antecedent of circumcision is seen as a "sign-act," which placed Jewish males within the covenant relationship between Israel and God. What is being deposited then is a notion of an act in the physical and material order

leading to initiation/membership in the covenant community of faith.

Water as a “Sign-Act”

Turning the focus more directly to the “sign-act” which utilizes water, it may be noted that it is in the practice of the Jewish community in the pre-Christian period, that it becomes evident that ritual washings were a regular feature. The act of outward washing with water signified an inner reality of the cleansing of the soul from ritual or moral infractions. One such use of ritual washing was for the reception of non-Jew converts (proselytes) who were being received into the religion of Israel. This was preceded by intensive instruction of the convert into the faith and the giving of a new name.

It should then become clear that the early church was influenced by these pre-Christian practices, and they informed the development of the catechumenate or period of preparation prior to Baptism, which was adopted by the early Church.

Water and Creation

This is certainly not the only way in which the religion of Israel influenced the Christian practice and understanding of Baptism. Accordingly, St. Paul, the great contributor of the major section of New Testament Scripture, looked back to the Scriptures of the Jews in search of an understanding of the significance of water in that context to see how it may provide some clue to understanding baptism from a Christian perspective.

Thus, it has been suggested that in St. Paul’s famous statement about Baptism as a participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, he may have been recalling the image of Genesis 1:2 which mentions ‘the Spirit of God moving over the face of the waters’ in the beginning of creation, seeing in it a connection between this movement of water and the beginning of creation. For Paul, then, he could assert that the believer in Christ, when baptised, dies with Christ (to the old order) and rises to a new creation.

The roots of a Christian understanding of Christology, and hence Baptism, takes shape within the prophetic strand of the OT. These strands find expression to a significant degree in the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Malachi. Jeremiah 31:31-34 points to the coming of a new covenant relationship between God and his people, which will find expression not so much in symbolic and external acts for release from sin, but in terms of a new metaphor of union, relationship, and experience.

The language of Jeremiah reflects this change of metaphor – “law within them,” “on their hearts,” and “they shall all know me”- pointing to an internalization of the experience of God in a new way. Ezekiel 11, 18, and 36 speak to the “new spirit” and the “new heart” and “the heart of flesh,” which will replace “the heart of stone.” These passages lend themselves to

association with the emerging Messianic expectation. This becomes crystallized in Malachi with the expectation of the coming one, which has been the subject of appropriation and interpretation within the Christian understanding of Jesus as the Messiah.

NEW TESTAMENT UNDERSTANDING

Recognizing that there are some Christians who seek to use uncritically verses or incidents from Scripture to prove a point and to establish what they consider precedence for emerging contemporary practices, an exploration of evidence of Baptism in the New Testament must be identified and explored.

The earliest evidence of the practice of Baptism in the New Testament are the baptisms of John the Baptist, and these must be understood as pre-Christian baptisms. The same is true of the baptisms attributed to the disciples of Jesus. The reason for this understanding is well articulated by St. Paul, who sees participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus as the core to an understanding of Christian Baptism, and this could only have taken place after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

The Baptism of John

Many of the newer churches in confronting Anglicans attempt to use their understanding of the Baptism of John as a normative expression of Christian Baptism in terms of form and kind. What then is to be made of the Baptism of John? John challenged his hearers to respond by way of 'a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' in view of what he saw as an approaching judgment. John's Baptism has, therefore, been characterized as "a baptism of repentance and a baptism of eschatological expectation." It had both ethical and eschatological/anticipatory dimensions.

The Baptism of Jesus at the hand of John the Baptist

With the Baptism of Jesus at the hand of John, however, Jesus not only gave validation and authority to Baptism, but there is also a further movement as his water baptism becomes a baptism of the Spirit. So Christian Baptism, while including the Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, would go beyond this to become a baptism of the Spirit. Christian Baptism, in comparison to that of John's, may be regarded as having deeper and more positive dimensions.

While acknowledging, therefore, that the Baptism of Jesus took the understanding of Baptism to a new level, nevertheless, Christian Baptism does not become a reality until we get to the birth of the church, the time after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

It is important that Christians keep these things in mind in view of the existence of those who attempt to use the Baptism of John as the prototype of Christian Baptism, and also those who use John's Baptism to make a distinction between 'water baptism' and what they designate 'Spirit baptism' to reflect the experience of the day of Pentecost in a way that puts one in opposition to the other.

Baptism and the Day of Pentecost

The experience of the day of Pentecost brings these two elements into focus as the Acts of the Apostles describes it as the coming of the Holy Spirit and as Baptism with the Holy Spirit. It has been suggested that this should be regarded as the first Christian Baptism. While it appears that some of the converts here receive the Holy Spirit before they are baptised, yet Peter in his preaching called upon his hearers to 'Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:38).

There are difficulties involved in trying to establish a normative position out of the relationship between 'water baptism' and 'spirit baptism' from the events of the Day of Pentecost as it subsequently evolved in the life and teaching of the Church. What seems clear, however, from a serious reading of the text is that the two dimensions were brought together on the same occasion in the life of the Church, thus bringing into a dynamic relationship the outward and inward dimensions of Baptism.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BAPTISM

The promise of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the Comforter, to which our Lord pointed, was to be the means by which the risen Christ is communicated to the disciples. So, it becomes another expression of the metaphor of union and inwardness by which the one who is in Christ receives the Christ-life. This life-giving nature of the Holy Spirit is underscored by our Lord in John 7:37-39 with the promise of "living water" after he was glorified.

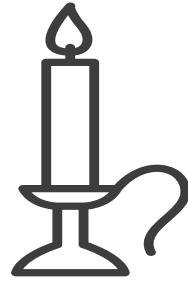
The Holy Spirit then becomes understood as an indwelling presence making possible union with the risen Christ. In Acts 19, Paul encounters some disciples who had received the Baptism of John but had not heard of the Holy Spirit or received the Holy Spirit. Here Paul's question becomes important – "Into what then were you baptised?"

This not only indicates the deficiency of the parallel "sign act" approach in relation to the Jewish precursors but it moves towards an affirmation of the element of Baptism as a sacrament which makes possible "union" with Christ and, as a consequence, the reception of the Holy Spirit with power.

Water Baptism and the Outpouring of the Spirit

There yet remains the issue of how to relate water baptism with the outpouring of the Spirit with integrity. Aidan Kavanagh offers the following position:

Both water baptism and the outpouring of the Spirit are necessary, but it is of less importance to note, which comes first than to realize how both follow upon the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection and exaltation. All three of these events – proclamation, Baptism, and the outpouring of Spirit – constitute the integrity of initiation into the believing community, the locale of the Spirit, which is the Church. What one is confronted within the New Testament is not a set of separate and sometimes competing initiatory events but an initiatory continuum in the earliest stages of evolution.



The evidence concerning the laying on of hands is not as straightforward and therefore raises questions concerning the relationship between Baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit. While it is not mentioned in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, it is mentioned in ambiguous ways in different incidents in the Acts of the Apostles.

In Acts 2:38, the elements of repentance, Baptism, the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit are all brought into a relationship. In other passages such as Acts 10:47, Acts 8:17, and Acts 19:6, the sequence in which Baptism is administered and the Holy Spirit received is not consistent. What is clear from these incidents, however, is that “the Holy Spirit and baptism are directly and intimately related, and the laying on of hands or sealing (anointing) (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13 and 4:30), seems to testify to this relation by emphasizing the presence of the Spirit in those baptised.”

The Church Fathers on Baptism: The Trinitarian Formula and the Catechumenate

According to the Didache (one of the oldest Christian documents), those who are not baptised “in the Lord's name” are forbidden from participating in the Holy Eucharist. The form of Baptism is to be that which utilizes the Trinitarian formula; thus, water was to be poured “thrice upon the candidate's head in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Tertullian speaks of a detailed and extensive preparation of candidates for Baptism, which could last for up to three years.

The Baptism of the converts took place primarily around the Easter Vigil but could also

take place at Pentecost. The Bishop was the one who presided, but he could delegate the responsibility to presbyters and deacons, and even laypersons are seen to be so authorized to administer Baptism. The complex rite which developed around the Baptism of Easter Eve included anointings, washing, laying on of hands and signing, embracing (kiss of peace), and eating and drinking.

In summation, the early church's rites of initiation and reconciliation were public, involving the whole community. The full rites of initiation came at Easter at the end of a long catechumenate and consisted of a variety of acts at the Easter vigil: anointings, renunciations, creedal profession, washing, laying on of hands, sealing, and eucharist. Post-baptismal catechesis followed. It was a formalized way of ritualizing the whole process of conversion from first inquiry to final and total commitment, all tied directly to the celebration of the resurrection.

INFANT BAPTISM

A major theological and ecumenical issue concerning Baptism is the question of infant baptism. It is argued, against infant baptism, that infants cannot fulfill the conditions for Baptism: renunciation of evil, repentance, and faith, not mention being sinners. In favour of infant baptism, it is argued that the sponsors can fulfill these conditions since, according to the Bible, God acts in response to the faith of sponsors and representatives (Matt8:5-13; Mark2:3-12; 9:14-29). It is further argued in favour of infant baptism that the Holy Spirit can be received unconsciously as well as consciously, that the infant is involved in original sin in the sense of tendency towards self-assertion. That infant baptism symbolizes that God's love and grace are prevenient and unmerited (Mark10:15).

THEOLOGICAL ISSUES

The New Testament scriptures and the liturgy of the Church unfold the meaning of Baptism in various images that express the riches of Christ and the gifts of his salvation. These images are sometimes linked with the symbolic uses of water in the Old Testament.

James White identifies within the baptismal liturgy what he calls "five New Testament metaphors of initiation." These metaphors are:

1. union with Jesus Christ
2. incorporation into the church
3. new birth
4. the forgiveness of sin
5. reception of the Holy Spirit.

Additional images from Scripture include:

1. The experience of salvation from the flood (I Peter 3:20-21)
2. An exodus from bondage (I Cor. 10:1-2)
3. Enlightenment by Christ (Eph. 5:14)
4. A re clothing in Christ (Gal. 3:27)
5. A liberation into a new humanity in which barriers of division whether of sex or race or social status are transcended (Gal. 3:27-28; I Cor. 12:13)
6. Participation in Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5; Col. 2:12); a new birth (John 3:5)

PARTICIPATION IN CHRIST'S LIFE DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Baptism means participating in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus went down into the river Jordan and was baptised in solidarity with sinners to fulfil all righteousness (Matt. 3:15). This Baptism led Jesus along the way of the Suffering Servant, made manifest in his sufferings, death, and resurrection (Mark 10:38-40, 45).

By Baptism, Christians are immersed in the liberating death of Christ where their sins are buried, where the "old Adam" is crucified with Christ, and where the power of sin is broken. Thus, those baptised are no longer slaves to sin but free. Fully identified with the death of Christ, they are buried with him and are raised here and now to a new life in the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, confident that they will also ultimately be one with him in a resurrection like his (Rom. 6: 3-11; Col. 2:13, 3:1; Eph. 2: 5-6).

St Paul provides us with affirmations which point clearly to the union of the Christian with Christ by virtue of Baptism, through the utilization of images of dying and rising in reference to Baptism as a way of pointing to the sharing in the parallel reality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In Romans 6:3-5, Paul writes:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

The same idea is present also in Colossians 2:12:

When you were buried with him in Baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

That which is expressive of the salvific and climactic expression of history in the coming of the kingdom is now personalized and internalized in the life of those who are in union with Christ. (See the Declaration in the Liturgy for Holy Baptism, BCP page 272)

A WASHING AWAY OF SIN

The Baptism, which makes Christians partakers of the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection implies confession of sin and conversion of heart. The Baptism administered by John was itself a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4).

The New Testament underlines the ethical implications of Baptism by representing it as an ablution which washes the body with pure water, a cleansing of the heart of all sin, and an act of justification (Heb. 10:22; I Peter 3:21; Acts 22:16; I Cor. 6:11). Thus, those baptised are pardoned, cleansed, and sanctified by Christ, and are given as part of their baptismal experience a new ethical orientation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit

NEW BIRTH

Jesus introduced the image of new birth in his dialogue with Nicodemus as recorded in John 3:5:

No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born from water and Spirit.

Here the reference to birth by water and Spirit takes the form of an allusion to Baptism performed in water and, in the context of the early Christian experience, is accompanied by the gift of the Spirit. The flesh speaks of the realm of unbelief, of separation from the knowledge of God. Nicodemus is, therefore, being called upon not to acknowledge Jesus by his old standards (the flesh), but to break away from them into a new realm (the Spirit).

Perhaps similar ideas of the new birth are present in Paul's notion of the new creation in 2 Corinthians 5:17: So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!

Drawing on an apocalyptic image by which he perceives that the people who are "in Christ," though living in a world that is perishing and doomed to pass away, have become part of God's "new creation." This "new creation" speaks of a radically transformed order where Christ's love, instituted through the cross, is to govern all perception and every action. It represents a movement from death to life, from darkness to light. The church is the place

where they celebrate their new life in the present and await what is still to come in the eschatological horizon.

The apostle Paul closely associates this new creation not just with a closed community of the faithful but with the reconciliation of the world and of all people to God (2 Corinth. 5:18-19). Harper Commentary (See The Liturgy for Baptism – The Declaration page 272, and the Blessing of the Water page 277).



RECEPTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In a number of passages, Paul also ties the gift of the Holy Spirit with Baptism. He often links the baptismal washing with the work of the Holy Spirit. In Titus 3:5, Paul speaks of the “water of rebirth and the renewal of the Holy Spirit.” In I Corinthians 6:11, he writes, “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” In I Corinthians 12:13 the link appears again, “for in the one Spirit we were all baptised into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

In 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 Paul adds another term to the relationship of the Holy Spirit and Baptism: “But it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us, by putting his seal on us and giving us his Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.” Similarly, in Ephesians 1: 13-14, Paul says, “In (Christ) you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.”

In Baptism, Christians are sealed, that is, they are marked with the sign that they are God's property, and the Holy Spirit affirms that truth in their hearts and lives.

The laying on of hands in the New Testament is understood either as a form of commissioning (e.g., Acts 13:2) or as an act of acceptance. It is highly questionable whether any of the various laying on of hands which are described in the New Testament corresponds exactly to Confirmation as we know it.

However, St. Paul's teaching that it is our baptismal adoption which initiates our relationship with the Holy Spirit should be taken as the final word on that subject.

Baptism leads to Full Membership. Baptism in water is complete sacramental initiation. It confers full membership into the body of Christ, the church.

A RENEWAL BY THE SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of people before, in, and after their Baptism. It is the same Spirit who revealed Jesus as the Son (Mark 1:10-11) and who empowered and united the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2). God bestows upon all baptised persons the anointing and the promise of the Holy Spirit, marks them with a seal and implants in their hearts the first instalment of their inheritance as sons and daughters of God. The Holy Spirit nurtures the life of faith in their hearts until the final deliverance when they will enter into its full possession, to the praise of the glory of God (II Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14).

INCORPORATION INTO THE BODY OF CHRIST

Administered in obedience to our Lord, Baptism is a sign and seal of our common discipleship. Through Baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place. Our common Baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a fundamental bond of unity. We are one people and are called to confess and serve one Lord in each place and in all the world.

The union with Christ, which we share through Baptism, has important implications for Christian unity. "There is ... one Baptism, one God and Father of us all..." (Eph. 4:4-6). When baptismal unity is realized in one holy, catholic, apostolic Church, a genuine Christian witness can be made to the healing and reconciling love of God. Therefore, our one Baptism into Christ constitutes a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship.

By Baptism, a person becomes a full member of the body of Christ, each having the same status in spite of age, race, or gender.

St. Paul also speaks to this reality at several points in his epistles.

"we were all brought into one body by baptism in the one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:13)

As many of you as were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Baptism, therefore, as a sacrament, is a sign-act that makes effective one's entrance into

the church. (See The Catechism #111 page 409).

ENTRY INTO A NEW COMMUNITY

One of the principal features of Baptism, as we have noted, is that the person baptised is brought into a new community. That person's being is now lived in this new community. It even claims to be a new humanity. If we keep this communal aspect of Baptism clearly in view, then we shall neither think that children who have not yet reached the stage of conscious faith should be excluded nor shall we have to invoke any 'magical' sacramentality to justify their inclusion. We remember that 'reception' and 'community' are keywords in the understanding of infant baptism.

BECOMING MEMBERS OF CHRIST IN THE CHURCH

Bishop Ramsbotham argues that the declaratory significance of Baptism, that we are children of God and heirs of Christ's work of redemption, has to be balanced by renewed insistence that we should become members of Christ in the Church that is under fire; that we should become committed, active, living the baptismal life; so that the Church's witness to the love of God and the triumph of Christ may go on being made in the world.

THE SIGN OF THE KINGDOM

Baptism initiates the reality of the new life given amid the present world. It provides participation in the community of the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of the Kingdom of God and of the life of the world to come. Through the gifts of faith, hope, and love, Baptism has a dynamic that embraces the whole of life, extends to all nations, and anticipates the day when every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

BAPTISM AND FAITH

1. Baptism is both God's gift and our human response to that gift. It looks towards a growth into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). The necessity of faith for the reception of the salvation embodied and outlined in Baptism is acknowledged by all churches. Personal commitment is necessary for responsible membership in the body of Christ.

2. Baptism is related not only to momentary experience but to life-long growth into Christ. Those baptised are called upon to reflect the glory of the Lord as they are transformed by

the power of the Holy Spirit, into his likeness, with ever-increasing splendour (II Cor. 3:18). The life of the Christian is necessarily one of continuing struggle yet also one of the ongoing experience of grace. In this new relationship, the baptised live for the sake of Christ, of his Church and of the world which he loves, while they wait in hope for the manifestation of God's new creation and for the time when God will be all in all (Rom. 8:18-24; I Cor. 15:22-28, 49-57).

3. As they grow in the Christian life of faith, baptised believers demonstrate that humanity can be regenerated and liberated. They have a collective responsibility, here and now, to bear witness together to the Gospel of Christ, the Liberator of all human beings. The context of this common witness is the Church and the world.

Within a fellowship of witness and service, Christians discover the full significance of the one Baptism as the gift of God to all God's people. Likewise, they acknowledge that Baptism, as a baptism into Christ's death, has ethical implications which not only call for personal sanctification but also motivate Christians to strive for the realization of the will of God in all realms of life (Rom. 6:9 ff.; Gal. 3:27-28; I Peter 2:21-4:6).

BAPTISM — CHRISMATION — CONFIRMATION

In God's work of salvation, the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection is inseparably linked with the Pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, participation in Christ's death and resurrection is inseparably linked with the receiving of the Spirit. Baptism, in its full meaning, signifies and effects both.

Christians differ in their understanding as to where the sign of the gift of the Spirit is to be found. Different actions have become associated with the giving of the Spirit. For some, it is the water rite itself. For others, it is the anointing with chrism and/or the imposition of hands, which many churches call Confirmation. For still others, it is all three, as they see the Spirit operative throughout the rite. All agree that Christian Baptism is in water and the Holy Spirit.

Baptism, as incorporation into the body of Christ, points by its very nature to the eucharistic sharing of Christ's body and blood. Baptism needs to be constantly reaffirmed. The most obvious form of such reaffirmation is the celebration of the eucharist.

The renewal of baptismal vows may also take place during such occasions as the annual celebration of the paschal mystery or during the Baptism of others

THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT

Candidates for Baptism in the early Church, after being given an extended period of instruction lasting up to three years, were baptised at dawn on Easter Day or Pentecost. Stepping into the water, the candidate was asked the three questions of the baptismal creed and with each answer was immersed in the water or had water poured upon his/her head. In today's liturgies of Baptism, the three questions of the creed have been retained, and to which have been added some additional questions which speak to the nature of the individual's commitment to a covenant relationship with God in Christ.



In the CPWI the Baptismal Covenant is given expression in the following manner:

Celebrant Do you believe in God the Father?

People I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Celebrant Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

People I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Celebrant Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

People I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

Celebrant Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

People I will, with God's help.

BAPTISM: IDENTITY AND VOCATION

Vocation for us begins in Baptism. Each of us is called. Each of us begins to feel and hear a call to great things from the beginning of our life as Christians.

Each of us hears the Gospel, the Good News of God-with-us. And when we give careful attention, that Good News is molding each of us into lovers with an urge to embrace the world as Jesus did.

We have trouble seeing our little individual selves, our uniqueness, as participating in God's creative work. That is why the fundamental importance of Baptism as the beginning and source of Christian vocation needs to be stressed. It is Baptism where each of us as individual persons is touched by the Spirit and named "Beloved" — a particular gift in creation.

Each of us needs to hear and heed that divine voice saying, "In you, I am well pleased" —

and build our lives with confidence that the good and beautiful only we can do is of world-class importance. Saints do not reach that status by doing one great thing. They grow into greatness by doing small things again and again and again, heeding the persistent call to love as Jesus loves.

Children need the Christian community to affirm them and confirm their every generous deed as a sign of growing into Christ and entering the road to human maturity. This is crucial in amplifying the call planted in Baptism. It points out for children the way to being a real lover rather than a self-satisfying imitation. It raises the Gospel way of life onto the fresh scale of values being developed in childhood.

It increases the courage and creative energy needed to live out human life as vocation rather than a spiritually barren slide into death.

We ordinary, everyday people will be saints because we heard and nurtured the call that came in Baptism.

<http://www.catholicmessenger.net/2009/01/editorial-vocation-begins-in-baptism/>