

The Rite of Baptism in the Roman Catholic Church

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The celebration of the Rite of Baptism for Children is divided into five parts: the Reception of the Children, which takes place at the entrance of the church; the Liturgy of the Word, which takes place at the ambo; the Prayer of Exorcism and Anointing before Baptism; the Celebration of the Sacrament of Baptism, which takes place at the baptismal font; and the Conclusion of the Rite, which takes place at the altar. Each section is separated from the others by a procession, so the celebration of the Rite of Baptism may include as many as three processions. If a church uses them, these processions move the children from the doors of the church to the ambo, where the word of God will stir their faith as they grow, to the font where they are cleansed from the stain of original sin and are reborn into God's eternal life, and to the altar, where they will continue to be nourished with Christ himself, the Bread of Life.

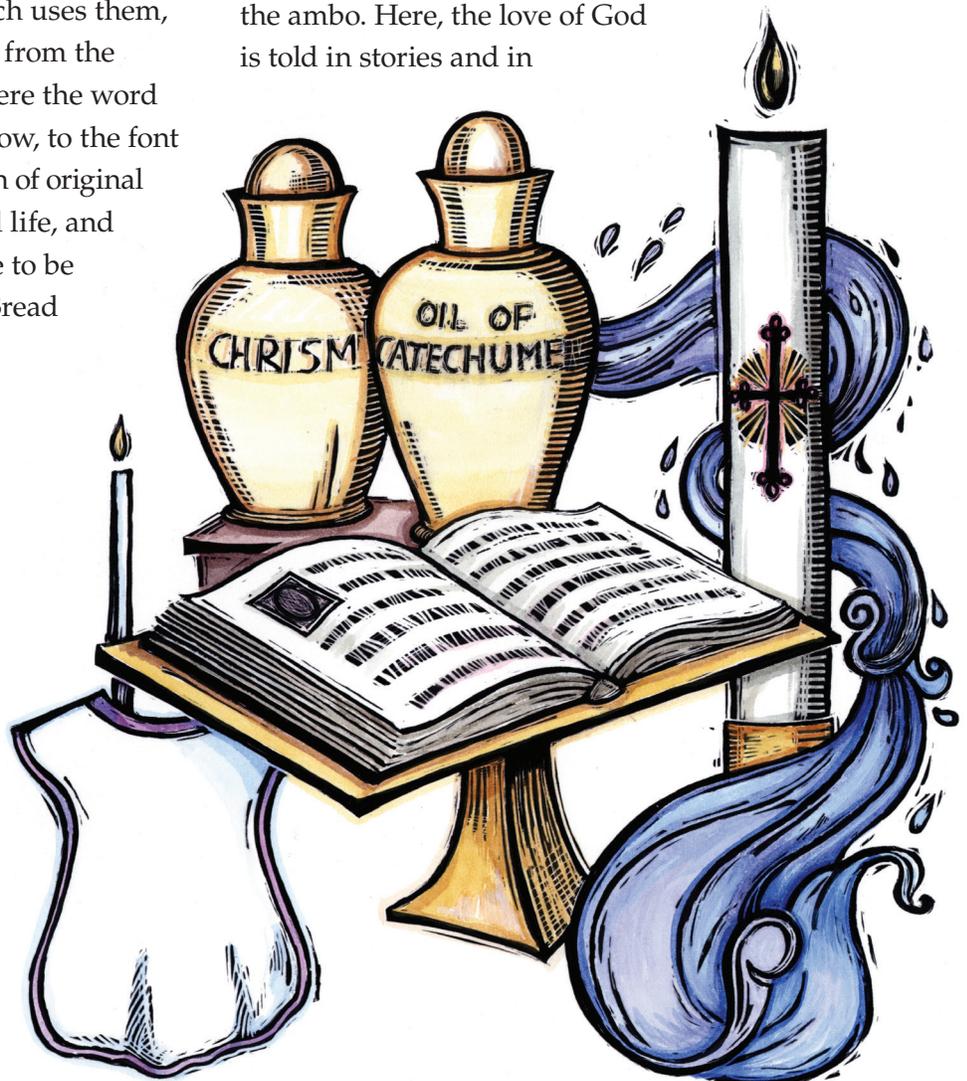
At the Entrance

When people knock at our door, we open to receive them. Likewise, the Church begins the Rite of Baptism for Children with welcoming words and actions. The celebrant greets the children and their families and then asks them to name the children being baptized. These children will not be strangers in the community but will be members who are known and called by name, as the Good Shepherd knows and calls his sheep by name.

After the parents ask for Baptism for their children, the celebrant welcomes the children into the Church by speaking each child's name and making the Sign of the Cross on each one's forehead. Parents and godparents repeat the gesture (sometimes brothers and sisters do, too). The children belong to Christ, who holds them in his arms through the love of all the Church.

At the Ambo

With the first procession, the assembly moves to the ambo. Here, the love of God is told in stories and in



psalms, in prophecies and in parables. Here, miracles are revealed, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is proclaimed, the kingdom of God is announced, and its meaning is explored. God's word will nourish the children throughout their lives. Through the word, God gives us life, hope, and guidance.

If there is no homily, then the prayers of the faithful follow, with special prayers for the children receiving Baptism. Then in the litany, the saints—especially the children's patron saints—are asked to join us in praying for them. The community gathered in support of these children is both local and universal, from heaven as well as from earth, from this time as well as from all times. Then the children are anointed with the oil of catechumens to free the children from sin and evil and to confer the strength of the power of Christ.

At the Font

When the celebrant and the children with their families and godparents process to the font, the whole congregation may also go. Having heard the word of God, the community is ready to celebrate the sacrament of Baptism. Now the water, too, is made ready, with a prayer recalling how God has used water—in Creation, in the great flood, in the Exodus, in the Baptism of Jesus and again in Jesus' death—to bring life. This prayer continues, asking God to send the Holy Spirit upon the water so that it might be a source of new life for those who will be baptized in it. Finally, the congregation prepares itself by renewing the promises to reject sin and believe in the faith of the Church.

All is ready. As the children are immersed in the water, they are cleansed of the stain of original sin and receive from God the risen life of Christ. Each one is called again by name and baptized with the following words: "I baptize you in the name of



the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (*Rite of Baptism for Children*, #60).

Three more signs of the children's new life in Christ follow the Baptism. The children are anointed with chrism, which is oil mixed with perfume. Chrism seals the children as members of Christ (whose name means "the anointed one"). A white garment is then presented to each child. This garment serves as a sign of the child's new life in Christ and his or her membership in the Church. Finally, a small candle for each child is lit from the paschal candle. As the godparents light the candles on behalf of the children, the celebrant says, "Receive the light of Christ" (*Rite of Baptism for Children*, #64). The lit paschal candle proclaims that Jesus is risen. The small candle says that these children now share in his risen life. Sometimes, this is followed by the Prayer over Ears and Mouth in which the priest or deacon touches the ears and mouth of the child with his thumb and asks that the Lord Jesus would touch the ears of the newly baptized to receive his word and the mouth so that the child might proclaim faith in Christ and thereby give praise and glory to God.

At the Altar

By virtue of their Baptism, the children may participate in every other aspect of life in the Church. We process with them to the altar in anticipation of this participation. We are aware that it is here that they will be nourished throughout their lives with Christ in the bread and wine of Eucharist.

The celebration concludes at the altar with the Lord's Prayer and with blessings for the mothers and fathers, godparents, family members, and the parish community. Together they will nurture the children's lives as well as receive the particular blessings that each of them brings to the Church.

