

B

aptism. The First Sacrament of Initiation



ur Baptism puts us in touch with Jesus, the Word made flesh, the incarnate expression of God's love. The Church, the body of Christ, bears new children of God through water and the Spirit. The sign of Baptism has been a key part of the Church from the beginning. Baptized and confirmed in the Spirit, we are led to the altar to celebrate the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, to be a Catholic is to be Eucharistic in who we are and in the way we live. Baptism means we are christened a priest, prophet and king as Christ was anointed, we are one with Him in the Body. Paul puts it clearly: "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me." Gal 2:20.

From *Baptism, Our lifelong call* by Nicholas Lohkamp, O.F.M in Catholic Update, July 2006

Baptism Q & A

- Q. I am a registered parishioner of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Winter Haven. What requirements must be met in order to have my child baptized?
- A. It depends on the age of the child. As an infant (birth to seven years old), your child is incapable of personal responsibility. At this age, parents and godparents, who represent the local and universal Church, proclaim the faith of the Church for them. In addition, you must also attend a Baptismal Class.
- Q. Tell me about the Baptismal Class. Do both parents have to attend? Do godparents have to attend?

We offer these classes on the first Monday of every month at seven p.m. in the Chapel Adoration Room or in the schoolteacher's lounge. In case of the date being a holiday, the class will be on the following Monday. The chapel is located across Ave. M N.W. on the south side of the main church and the Adoration Room is located on the right side of the vestibule. The faculty lounge in the school is located on the first floor at the

east end of the building on the south side. Classes last one hour and must be taken within five years of the date you wish the Baptism to occur. At this class, you will learn the meaning and purpose of baptism. You will also be completing the baptismal information form, which will be used to update the official registry of the church. Please take the time needed to fill it out as thoroughly as possible to prevent delay in scheduling your baptism. It is best that both parents attend the class but we understand that may not be possible for every family. Godparents are welcomed but not required to attend the class but for some churches, it is a requirement.

Q. My children are age seven or older. Why can't they be baptized like infants? They are still children.

A. At age seven, your child has reached the age of discretion and is able to have or profess his own personal faith. He is no longer an infant in the eyes of the Catholic Church and is old enough to be instructed or catechized. Therefore, he should be accepted into the Order of Catechumens and prepared for the sacraments of Baptism, First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

Q. I am not registered at St. Joseph. Can I still have my child that is younger than seven years old baptized here?

A. Yes, but parents should normally seek baptism in the home parish or the church in which they are registered and where they are *known*. Because you are unknown to us, a *Letter of Permission* must be obtained from your pastor allowing us to baptize your child here and a letter *verifying* that you are an *active and practicing Catholic*, (go to church on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation) there. If you are new to St. Joseph and wish to register, the forms are available in the church office or at the Baptismal class. Please bear in mind that registration is not proof that you have received all the Sacraments of Initiation nor is it proof of your active participation in Church life. For this reason, new registrants must wait three months for the tracking of Mass attendance through your donation envelope return. Even if there is no donation in the envelope, its submission into the collection basket verifies your Mass attendance and, most importantly, your intent to raise your child as a Catholic.

Q. Why do I have to register at a Church?

A. The pastor of your church has a responsibility to answer truthfully that you are Catholic and that you are serious in your intention to raise your child as a Catholic member of your family and your church. Therefore, if you attend church, registration establishes your parish identity in order to prove Sponsorship eligibility and record Sacraments received. Your registration and support, either financially or through volunteer ministry, allows you to become known as an *active* member of your Catholic family. If you are asked to be a godparent or Confirmation sponsor, you will be asked for a sponsor verification form from your parish that proves you are a "practicing Catholic" or face disqualification from that honor. In the event you move, it is important to notify the church that you are leaving so that your Sacramental records can be kept up to date in your new parish after you register with them.

Q. What requirements are needed for Godparents?

A. Canon law (canons 873 and 874) requires that:

- Godparents must be fully initiated (have received the initial Sacraments of Baptism, First Holy Communion and Confirmation) and practicing Catholics (go to Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of

Obligation). This information must be verified by a letter of sponsorship from the home parish of the godparent. The sponsorship letter must be in our possession no less than one week before the baptism date requested.

- Must be over the age of sixteen.
- There may be either one or two godparents and if there are two, there is one from each gender.
- If there is only one godparent, it may be from either gender.
- Members of other Christian churches may not be godparents but may serve as a Christian witness *as long as there is also one eligible godparent.*

Q. Now that I have taken the Baptismal class and have selected eligible godparents, when can I schedule my child's Baptism?

A. Baptisms are usually scheduled to occur during or after the 11:45 am Sunday Mass in the Church. You must call the office at least one week prior to the date requested and arrange the baptism with Becky Roach, D.R.E. Monday through Thursday during office hours between 9:00 am. and 5:00 pm. If out of town guests are a concern we will make every effort to work with you in advance but you must make sure that you have scheduled enough time to complete the process.

Q. Is there a charge expected for a Baptism?

A. No. There is no charge. Many people, as a courtesy, do give a stipend to the priest or deacon who officiates but this amount is a personal choice.

