

Faith Formation *Sacramental Prep*

S T . I G N A T I U S L O Y O L A P A R I S H

BAPTISM CLASS

BAPTISM PREP

RELIGIOUS ED

HISTORY

RITUALS

MYSTAGOGIA

FAMILY

CULTURE

PERSONAL PREP

SACRAMENTALS

Every other month, on the second Saturday, at 9AM, I'm supposed to teach a class on Baptism. It is a requirement of the diocese for parents and godparents to attend.

My first question in developing a presentation was "What's required?" as in "What do I need to know in order to be a good Catholic parent or godparent?" I soon learned I needed also to include "What's required?" in the sense of forms to complete and actual requirements of godparents. (Did you know that you may have only two godparents and, if two, one must be male and one female? Godparents must be confirmed, and if married, married in the church.)

These may be requirements but they are not the essence of what one should know to prepare for baptism. Well then, what should we know?

History: What does the bible say about baptism? What scriptural texts would you turn to for understanding? Most would of course include Jesus' baptism in the Jordan. Most miss the part about the Israelite's crossing the Red Sea in their escape from Egypt as well as sections of Acts that speak about households being baptized. Now that I've mentioned these, what other scripture passages do you think relate to baptism?

Rituals: The full form of baptism can

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Symbols & Rituals

Our celebrations of sacraments are full of symbols, many of which come not from the church but from our families. How many have a baptismal gown that has been handed down from generation to generation? What does a symbol like that say to us about the sacrament and about our faith?

How does one pick the godparents? Sometimes the individuals are a part of our family—again, what's the significance of that? Sometimes the individual is a best friend or co-worker—how does that fit with our faith? There are many little things that we do that have tremendous meaning, not always shared with one another.

Another example, the name that is given to the child, is it a saint, a family name, to honor a friend or a hope for a particular life for your child? I try to get folks to share these bits with friends and family that these meanings and graces don't remain hidden.

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Baptism Class (cont.)

best be experienced at the Easter Vigil which is often the culmination of the RCIA process (Right of Christian Initiation of Adults). Many of the scriptural sources for baptism are included as readings for the Easter Vigil, including the creation narrative from Genesis.

Furthermore, in case you missed it, the blessing of baptismal water has a pretty full list of these same sources. And for those who pay attention to the whole of the RCIA process you can see each step of that process mirror in miniature in the ritual of baptism for children. This includes the welcome into the church, the anointing with the oil of catechumens, the exorcisms and the

clothing with a white garment. Yes, it is a lot more than just the water and formula.

Catechism: The last resource that I usually list for baptism class is the Catechism. It should not be surprising that there is a bit of a redundancy—the same scripture passages and the same mention of rituals, requirements and such.

Mystagogia: What is often missed is the “experience” that comes from baptism, especially those baptized as adults. It is the unveiling of the “mystery”. That does not mean the “secret handshake” or cultic practices but rather the “revelation by God” of



things we cannot explain. Now this can come before, as part of the baptism prep, as well as the experience of the rite and life after baptism. What might you have experienced as holy and special that resulted from the baptism of your child, your brother or sister, or your god child? Was there a special sense of acceptance? Was there a special sense of commitment and responsibility on your part? Was there a new hope, a deepening of faith and understanding? This is mystagogia, not an explanation but an experience.



Symbols & Rituals (cont)

As I try to remember to tell my baptism classes, the ceremony for infant baptism is an abbreviation of the larger RCIA program, Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. For those now participating in the “Restored Order”, you may know that the rites of initiation are not completed until Communion and Confirmation. And that part of the ritual of baptism is an anointing with Sacred Chrism as a promise for that completion, that full membership in the Church. Yet even after Communion and Confirmation our

baptism is still not complete—not complete in the sense that we continue to grow in our membership, in our faith and in the ways we live that faith.

Did you know that the most frequent symbols at a funeral service are that of baptism? The sprinkling with holy water, the pall itself as baptismal garment, the use of the Easter candle, the placement of the casket in the midst of the community as still a member of the community—all these point to our baptism. For after all, baptism is a sign of our

dying and rising to new life. The symbols and rituals of baptism follow us throughout our faith life. Don’t believe me, then why do we always dip our fingers in holy water when we come into church? To remind us that our membership is rooted in our baptism. And it is by virtue of our baptism that we are called to go into the world to proclaim the gospel, each and every one of us.



- **What symbols from baptism are part of our routine acts of prayer?**
- **Are there family customs (rituals) around baptism?**
- **What experiences of faith do you recall from the celebrations of baptism that you were a part of? (The Mystagogia)**

Practicing Your Faith

One of the questions that godparents are asked during the baptism ritual is: “Are you prepared to help the parents to bring up this child in the practice of the faith?” Of course the answer is “yes” but I like to ask parents and godparents in class “What is the practice of your faith?” Many will speak about going to church on Sundays and/or the sacraments. Some will even chime in with sending the child to Religious Education classes. (Which I’m sure Toni and Angela love to

hear.) Yet the practice of our faith is so much larger than that. And so is raising your child in the practice of the faith.

Do you teach your child how to play nice with other children? Do you teach your child that you will be there with them in good times and in bad? Do you teach your children wonder and awe, not only in creation but also in the wonder and awe of family and friends? If you do then you are bringing your child up in the practice of the faith.

Of course there are many things that intentionally link behavior with faith. There are the bedtime prayers but also the prayers of remembrance or help for someone in need. There are the bible stories and bible songs, but

there are also many other stories and songs that teach right and wrong, care for others, even proper stewardship and love of creation.

All these, my brothers and sisters are part of the practice of our faith. Don’t believe me? Well then you haven’t been paying attention to the Seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching or the practice of the faith of so many different saints who spent their lives toiling in the service of others (Mother Theresa of Calcutta for example.)

It is good for us to reflect on this practice of the faith that we might hand it onto our children. It doesn’t hurt to be a little intentional in linking doing good to following a good and loving God.

To Ponder and to Share

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Finding God in All Things

- What graces have you witnessed at a baptism? How do those graces stay and grow?
- What signs and symbols of baptism do you regularly see and use in your prayer?
- Do you believe the prayer of anointing, that like Jesus, we are anointed priest, prophet and king?

The gifts of Baptism

There are gifts that are both spiritual and physical. You may not think of it but your presence at this child's baptism is a gift and a promise. It is not always easy to travel cross-country and to commit to a weekend away. Yet this commitment is a sign of your commitment to both parents and child. And if you're willing to do this, then it's a sign of your willingness to do even more.

One practice that Loyola parish has is to give each child a knitted shawl, a prayer shawl created by a member of our prayer shawl ministry. This little token is a sign that our whole parish commits to helping to raise this child in the faith as well as in the community. This is one of the reasons we prefer to celebrate baptism as part of our Sunday liturgies to tangibly remind you of our love and support.

Yet the gifts of baptism are not just for the child but for the community as well. Parents who commit to raising their children in the faith, well that's a gift of great hope for us. In a world full of trouble we find families committing themselves to holiness and to a way of following Jesus in reconciling the world. This is a great gift for all of us. And one that I hope we all pay attention to.

As I have written already, "Mystagogia" is that period after RCIA, after the full initiation, where the newly baptized experience what it means to be a Christian. This is not something that can be taught by books or lectures but must be experienced. It is the unfolding revelation that God places into the heart. But it is not just for the individual, it is also for the community. It is with wonder and awe that we can begin to watch another grow in age, wisdom and grace. The same with the children baptized. It is our gift of baptism.

Baptism Websites

- <https://archden.org/sacraments/baptism/>
- <https://usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals/baptism/index.cfm>
- <https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/312/>