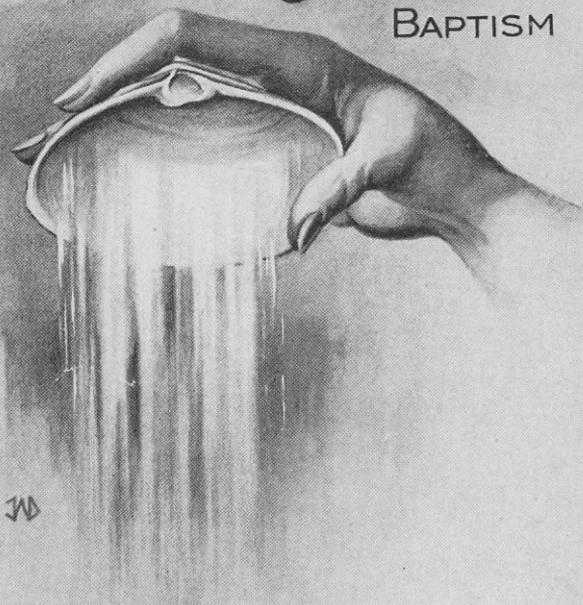


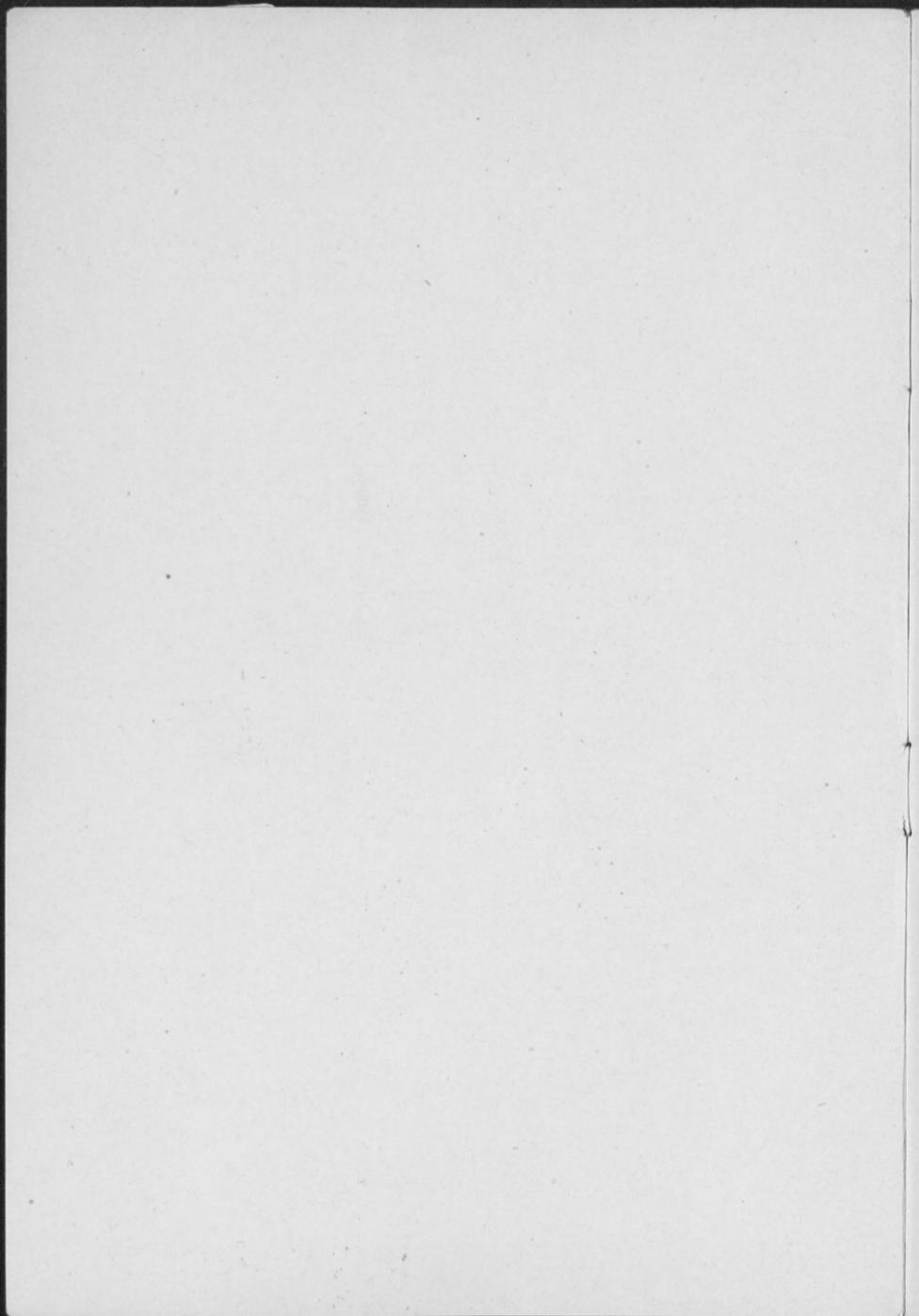
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Rebirth of the soul

THE
SACRAMENT
OF
BAPTISM



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REBIRTH OF THE SOUL

The Sacrament of Baptism

By THE REV. FRANCIS J. CONNELL, C.S.S.R., S.T.D.



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I. THE SACRAMENT OF SPIRITUAL BIRTH

MAN'S most treasured possession is life. The normal human being will sacrifice riches, honors and pleasures, and endure the most painful medical treatment if he can thereby prolong the life of his body for even a few years. The most dreaded punishment the law can inflict on a malefactor is to deprive him of life. The condemned criminal receives as most welcome tidings the announcement that his sentence has been commuted, even though he must spend the remainder of his days in prison.

Life is a gift of God Himself, for it is only by a creative act of the Most High that a human soul can come into existence, and it is only by the constant preservative activity of the Almighty that a human being is able to remain in existence. However, in the creation and the conservation of life, God makes use of secondary causes. The parents collaborate toward the formation of the infant body, into which the Creator then infuses a spiritual soul. For the preservation and the development of human life material factors, such as food, clothing, houses, are necessary means, according to the plan of divine Providence. God wills that the lower things of earth shall contribute toward the conservation and the well-being of earth's noblest creature, man.

Even if God gave human beings no more than natural life, they would have reason to be supremely grateful. For the soul which animates man's body is an immortal spirit, destined by its very nature to an endless existence beyond the grave. And even if men

had been created for a merely natural destiny, they would have been rewarded or punished in the future life according as they had merited or demerited during their earthly sojourn. However, in this supposition man's eternal reward, though it would have included a high degree of knowledge and of love of God, would not have consisted in the privilege of beholding the divine nature directly in all its beauty and splendor.

But God has deigned to confer on His human creatures another form of life—a life so sublime that in the present world we can understand it only very imperfectly. This new form of life bears an intimate resemblance to the life of God Himself. Indeed, St. Peter says that by virtue of this life we become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter i. 4). This new life, superadded to man's natural life, is called quite appropriately “the supernatural life”—that is, “the life above the natural life.” It is also called “the life of grace,” because its basic constituent is sanctifying grace. And every soul which leaves this world in the possession of supernatural life will enjoy for all eternity a share of the happiness proper to God Himself, for it will behold directly the infinite beauty of the divine essence—a privilege that is known as the “beatific vision.”

Adam and Eve, our first parents, received supernatural life from the Almighty when He created them. At the same time God constituted Adam the moral head, or representative, of all mankind, so that if Adam had been faithful to his Creator he would not only have merited for himself supernatural glory in

heaven but he would also have merited for all his descendants the supernatural life of grace. In other words, Adam himself and all other male parents would not only have co-operated with the Almighty in bestowing on their children natural life, but they would also have enriched them with supernatural life through the very act of generation as an instrument of God's sanctifying power.

However, Adam sinned, and thereby not only deprived his own soul of supernatural life but also lost this precious prerogative for all his descendants. Instead of communicating sanctifying grace to their offspring, male parents since the fall of Adam transmit to them a nature deprived of sanctifying grace—which privation is called original sin.

In all justice God could have allowed the human race to remain in its fallen state; but in His great goodness He determined to make the supernatural life again available to the children of men. To this end He sent His divine Son to earth to take to Himself a human nature in which He could atone for the sins of Adam and of his posterity, and merit for mankind the restoration to the supernatural state. This task Jesus Christ performed by offering to His Father for mankind—of whom He was the moral Head as Adam had been—the sufferings and the humiliations and the labors of His earthly life, particularly His passion and death. However, our Lord did not restore the supernatural life to men immediately and individually. Human beings were not to receive the state of grace, merited by the Redemption, concomitantly with the reception of their natural life, as would have happened

if Adam had not sinned. They were to be animated with the supernatural life only by applying to themselves or having applied to them certain definite means, the chief of which were seven visible rites, or signs of grace, called sacraments. In adopting this plan our Saviour was merely bringing into the supernatural order a mode of procedure similar to the method employed by God in the natural order. For, as was explained above, although the Creator is the primary cause of the production and of the preservation of man's natural life, He nevertheless procures these effects through the operation of secondary causes. So too, although God is the principal cause of supernatural grace, the sacraments function as secondary causes, subordinate to His omnipotence, toward the generation and the development of supernatural life in the souls of men. Moreover, each of the seven sacraments is intended to achieve a purpose or to supply a need in the life of grace corresponding to some normal event or necessity in man's natural life.

The first occurrence in the natural life is birth, and to provide the corresponding phase of the supernatural life Christ instituted the sacrament of Baptism. He referred to this sacrament under the aspect of a spiritual birth shortly after He began His public ministry. In the course of a conversation with the well-meaning but timid Pharisee, Nicodemus, Christ made the statement: "Unless a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus understood these words as referring to the natural life, and asked in amazement: "How can a man be born when he is old?" Then our Lord made it clear that He was

speaking of a birth far more sublime than that of the body. "Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John iii. 3-5). In this assertion our Saviour not only emphasized the necessity of the life of grace for the attainment of heaven, but He also indicated His intention of establishing a means of obtaining the life of grace, obligatory on all men, and consisting of an ablution with water. He used the word *again*, because in relation to man's natural life the acquisition of the life of grace is *another* birth, and also perhaps to imply that He was restoring to the human race the supernatural life it had lost in Adam. Finally, our Lord ascribed this spiritual birth to the Holy Ghost because the work of sanctification, though actually performed by all three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, is attributable in a particular way to the third Person, the Spirit of love and of holiness.

Shortly after Christ's conversation with Nicodemus the disciples of our Lord baptized some persons who had accepted His teachings (John iv. 1, 2); but it is uncertain whether this ceremony was the sacrament of Baptism or a mere foreshadowing of the sacrament, such as was the baptism conferred by St. John the Baptist (John i. 28-33). It is well to note that the baptism of John was not a sacrament, but a mere penitential rite, so that those who had received it were not free from the obligation of receiving Christ's Baptism (Acts xix. 4, 5).

At any rate, the sacrament of Baptism must have been in use before the time of Christ's passion, since

at the Last Supper the Apostles received Holy Communion and the priesthood, which can be conferred only on baptized persons. And just before His Ascension into heaven our Lord commissioned the Apostles to administer this sacrament to all men: "Going therefore teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew xxviii. 19) . . . "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark xvi. 16).

When the Apostles, filled with light and strength by the Holy Ghost who had come upon them (Acts ii. 4), set out to win the world to Christ, they realized that one of their most important functions was to confer Baptism as the divinely established means of endowing men with the supernatural life of divine grace. Almost every page of the *Acts of the Apostles*, the inspired account of the early Church, records the administration of this sacrament—sometimes to great multitudes, like the three thousand who were baptized on the first Pentecost, sometimes to small groups such as the household of Cornelius, sometimes to individuals, like the eunuch of Queen Candace (Acts ii. 41; x. 48; viii. 38). The dignity and the efficacy of Baptism are frequently extolled by St. Paul who designates it as "the laver of regeneration and renovation of the Holy Ghost," "the laver of water in the word of life," "illumination" (Titus iii. 5; Ephesians v. 26; Hebrews vi. 4).

From the earliest centuries the Catholic Church has emphasized the importance and the necessity of the sacrament whereby man is born to the supernatural life. Telling of his own conversion to Chris-

tianity, St. Cyprian wrote: "When the waters of regeneration had washed away the stains of my past life. . . . I came to see that the life which the Holy Spirit now communicated to me was from God" (Epistle i. 4). St. Athanasius wrote: "Being born again of water and the Spirit, we all receive life in Christ" (*Against the Arians* iii. 33). Many other citations from the ancient writers expressing this same doctrine could be given.

Because of the eminent sacredness of Baptism the Church surrounds the administration of this sacrament with a wealth of impressive ceremonies. In the early days it was usually conferred by the bishops; and adults were permitted to receive it only after a long and prayerful preparation. Two days in the year were deemed particularly appropriate for the administration of Baptism—the vigil of Easter, when the thought of Christ's resurrection reminded the recipients that they were rising from the death of sin to the life of grace, and the Vigil of Pentecost, the Feast of the Holy Ghost through whose sanctifying power the baptized person is born again.¹

It must be remembered that Baptism is not administered in the Catholic Church alone. The Oriental churches that have departed from Catholic unity, such as the Greek Orthodox Church, and also most of the Protestant churches administer Baptism as the ceremony of initiation into the Christian religion. It is true, some Protestants minimize the efficacy of Bap-

¹ A reminder of this ancient custom is the enactment of Church law which states that it is fitting, if it can be done conveniently, to baptize adults on the vigils of Easter and Pentecost, according to the ancient rite of the Church, especially in metropolitan or cathedral churches (Canon 772).

tism, regarding it as little more than a merely external ceremony. Nevertheless, when a non-Catholic baptizes, even though his belief in the nature and in the effects of this sacrament is defective, the rite is a true sacrament and possesses the same potency as that administered by a Catholic, provided the minister performs the essential ceremonies and has the general intention of giving Baptism as it was instituted by Christ.

Questions

1. What is to be said of the nature, the production and the conservation of man's natural life?
2. What would have been man's eternal destiny had he received only natural life?
3. What constitutes the supernatural life and its destiny?
4. How would men have received the supernatural life if Adam had not sinned?
5. How has the supernatural life been restored to mankind, and how is it conferred?
6. Narrate and explain the sayings of Christ referring to Baptism.
7. Cite some references to Baptism in the *Acts of the Apostles* and the *Epistles* of St. Paul.
8. What did some of the early writers say about Baptism?
9. Describe the administration of Baptism in the early Church.
10. What is important to note about Baptism conferred outside the Catholic Church?

II. THE LITURGY OF BAPTISM

As the external sign and means of man's rebirth to the supernatural life Christ selected the ceremony of the washing of the body with water. In His conversation with Nicodemus He indicated this by saying that men must be "born again of water and the Holy Ghost." He expressed this more clearly and gave us the word which is now in common use for this ceremony, when He commanded the Apostles to *baptize* (literally, *to wash*) all men in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. The use of water for the sacrament of spiritual regeneration is explicitly mentioned in the *Acts of the Apostles*, where the baptism of the eunuch is related as taking place in a body of water by the wayside, and again in the account of the baptism of Cornelius and his family, when St. Peter inquired: "Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized?" (Acts viii. 36; x. 47).

Evidently then, water is a necessary element of Baptism. In the language of Catholic theology water is the *remote matter* of this sacrament. Any kind of true, natural water, suitable for the purpose of ablution suffices, whether it be from ocean, river or lake, or from the clouds in the form of rain or dew. Likewise, melted snow or ice, and even water chemically composed by the union of hydrogen and oxygen can be used. A small admixture of some foreign substance, like the salt in ocean water, would not nullify the sacrament, as would a large percentage. Saliva, tears and perspiration do not suffice for valid baptism,

for although they are composed in great measure of water, they are not adapted to the purpose of washing, and this sacrament requires the ceremony of ablution to express that it washes sins from the soul.

The application of the water—the *proximate matter*, as it is called in theology—can be performed either by the total *immersion* of the body or by *infusion* (pouring) or by *aspersion* (sprinkling). Some non-Catholic denominations, particularly the Baptists, contend that only the first of these three methods constitutes a valid baptism. They argue that the word *baptize* in Greek means to *dip entirely*, to *plunge*. They also assert that in the early Christian centuries immersion was always used, which indicates that it was prescribed by Christ. However, these arguments can easily be answered. The Greek word *baptize* did indeed *originally* mean to *immerse totally*, but at the time of our Lord it had acquired the more general meaning of to *wash*—either wholly or partially. Thus, the Gospel of St. Mark in Greek calls the washing of the hands a *baptism* (Mark vii. 2-4). And since Christ is presumed to have used the word in its prevalent meaning, all that can be deduced from His command to baptize is that He prescribed *some* manner of ceremonial washing to symbolize spiritual cleansing. Now, surely, such a symbolic ablution is effected not only by immersion but also by infusion and aspersion, at least when the head, through which the soul exercises its chief functions, is washed.

Moreover, we have abundant evidence that infusion or aspersion as well as immersion was used even in the early days of Christianity. The treatise known

as the *Doctrine of the Twelve Apostles*, dating from about 100 or 150 A. D., directs: "If there is not sufficient water for immersion, *pour* water, etc." St. Cyprian wrote about the year 250 A. D.: "It must not disturb anyone when the sick are seen to receive Baptism by sprinkling or pouring, for they obtain the grace of our Lord" (Epistle lxix. n. 12). Indeed, the Bible itself implies that the sacrament of spiritual regeneration was sometimes given by infusion or aspersion. For example, when the jailer and his family were baptized by St. Paul at Philippi, one of these methods must have been used, since it is most improbable that there was in a jail of nineteen centuries ago a container sufficiently large for immersion. And so, while immersion was the ordinary practice in the Church until the twelfth century, the other modes were certainly in use at times from the beginning of the Christian era.

Whatever method of baptizing is employed, the water must touch the skin of the recipient's head. If it touched only the hair, there would be grave doubt about the validity of the sacrament. Moreover, the sacrament is certainly valid only when given on the head, because this is the principal part of the body. If the ablution were administered on the breast or the shoulders, the sacrament would probably not be given. The best method is to pour the water on the forehead. Furthermore, the water must *flow*, and not merely moisten the skin, otherwise the idea of washing is not adequately expressed. Because of this requirement, aspersion should never be employed when either of the other two modes is possible, because when the

recipient is merely sprinkled there is danger that the water may not flow (Canon 758).

While the baptismal ablution is being performed certain words must be spoken vocally and audibly. In the Latin Church these words—the *form* of the sacrament, they are called—are: “I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.” The substance of this formula is contained in Christ’s command to “baptize in the name of the Father, etc.” In the Oriental churches, both Catholic and non-Catholic, the form is: “The servant of God is baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.” As is evident, this is substantially identical with the Latin form, the only difference being that the passive rather than the active voice is used. The Oriental Christians prefer this way of expressing the form because it indicates that the human minister holds a subordinate place in the work of sanctification compared to God, the chief agent in every bestowal of grace. In the *Acts of the Apostles* it is narrated that Baptism was given “in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts ii. 38; viii. 12), and from this some have inferred that in those early days it was customary to use our Lord’s name in the baptismal form instead of the names of the three divine Persons. But the majority of Catholic scholars interpret these passages as meaning merely that the one conferring the sacrament acted as Christ’s representative and the one receiving it was thereby dedicated to our Lord’s service—not that the form was essentially different from that used today. At any rate, it is certain that at the present day Baptism is not validly con-

ferred unless the words accompanying the ablution contain the names of the three divine Persons and also assert that the one receiving the ablution is being baptized.

The same person must perform the action of baptizing and pronounce the required words. If one person poured the water and another pronounced the form, the sacrament would most probably be null and void. Furthermore, the one administering the sacrament must *physically* and *personally* apply the water or place the recipient in or under the water. If the one receiving Baptism immersed himself or poured water on his own head at the command of the one saying the words, no sacrament would be given.

When administered in church, Baptism is enhanced with beautiful ceremonies, rich in symbolism. The water to be used for this solemn rite is blessed twice a year—on the vigils of Easter and Pentecost—and a small quantity of holy oil is mixed with it. In the course of the ceremony of solemn Baptism the recipient is questioned concerning his faith in Catholic teachings and his loyalty to Christ. Like the warriors of old before battle, he is anointed with oil, for he must be a valiant soldier of the King of kings. Salt is put on his tongue as a symbol of heavenly wisdom and of preservation from the corruption of sin. With his fingers moistened with saliva the priest touches first the ears of the recipient, as Christ did to the deaf mute (Matthew vii. 33), to indicate that he must be ever ready to hear the truths of Christianity, and then his nostrils to symbolize the fragrance of virtue that should characterize Christians. The priest also de-

livers several exorcisms, admonishing the evil spirit to depart from the soul that is now being made the temple of God. In the actual baptism the priest pours the water three times, once for each of the three divine Persons. At the same time he addresses the recipient by the name he is to bear—and it should be a saint's name. Afterward he gives the baptized person a white garment to designate the purity which now resides in his soul, and a lighted candle to remind him that if he remains faithful to his duties as a Christian he will one day meet Christ in glory, as the ancients used to meet a distinguished guest with lighted torches.

The Church law obliges a person when receiving Baptism to have a sponsor, or godparent. At most two sponsors are permitted, and they must be of different sex. When an infant is being baptized the sponsors make the responses to the questions put to the child by the priest. Their chief duty is to provide a Catholic training for their godchild, if the parents neglect or are unable to do so. As is evident, only a good Catholic should be selected for the office of godparent. Parents cannot be sponsors for their own children. The sponsors must touch the recipient during the actual conferring of the sacrament, or at least receive him immediately afterward from the hands of the minister. A sponsor should ordinarily be at least thirteen years old. Religious and clergymen may not act as sponsors unless they receive special permission from their superiors. By the law of the Church a sponsor cannot validly marry his or her godchild without a dispensation; and a similar marital impediment exists between the one baptizing and the one baptized.

Questions

1. How do we know that water is necessary for Baptism?
2. Explain the nature of the water required for Baptism. What is the water called by theologians?
3. In what ways can the water be applied? What are these ways called in theological language?
4. What are the principal arguments of those who hold that immersion is necessary?
5. How are these arguments refuted?
6. What particular points must be noted regarding the act of baptizing?
7. What words constitute the form of Baptism in the Latin and the Oriental rites? What must be expressed in the form?
8. What of the administration of Baptism by two persons, dividing between them matter and form?
9. Describe and explain the ceremonies of solemn Baptism.
10. What is to be noted of the qualifications and the duties of godparents?

III. BAPTIZED AND BAPTIZER

All human beings are obliged by the law of God to receive Baptism, in order to attain to eternal salvation. Our Lord made this very clear when He said: "Unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John iii. 5). The word "man" means "anyone." The early writers of the Church proclaim the same truth in no uncertain terms. Tertullian, who lived about the year 200 A. D., wrote: "It is prescribed that no one shall be saved without Baptism" (*De Baptismo*, xii). Two centuries later St. Augustine asserted: "If you wish to be a Catholic, do not say that children who die without Baptism can obtain the pardon of original sin" (*De Anima*, iii. 9). This last quotation gives the basic reason for the necessity of this sacrament—because without it the soul cannot be cleansed of original sin, which is a barrier to entrance into heaven.

However, this doctrine is to be understood in the sense that Baptism is the sole *ordinary* means of sanctification and of salvation; for there are two *extraordinary* means whereby those who through no fault of their own do not receive this sacrament can be saved. The first of these is called the baptism of *blood* and consists in martyrdom for the faith of Christ or for some Christian virtue. Our Lord promised: "He that shall lose his life for Me shall find it" (Matthew x. 39), and the Church has always interpreted these words as an infallible assurance of eternal happiness for one who dies for Christ, even though he has not received the sacrament of Baptism. Such would be the **case** of an adult preparing to receive this sacrament,

or of an unbaptized child of Catholic parents who is slain by persecutors out of hatred for the religion of his father and mother. One who has reached the age of reason must have the intention of accepting death for the Faith or for the other Christian virtue at stake (for example, chastity), and must abstain from active resistance.

The other extraordinary means of salvation, known as the baptism of *desire*, is an act of love for God, based on His goodness in Himself (as distinct from love for God because of His goodness to us, which is gratitude). Our Lord has promised: "He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father" (John xiv. 21), and from this promise the Catholic Church concludes that anyone who loves God for His own sake thereby receives as a token of God's love the supernatural life of grace, bringing with it the right to eternal happiness. The act of love must be of the *supernatural* order—that is, it must be based on the knowledge of God derived from revelation, and not merely from reason. If one has actual mortal sins on his conscience besides original sin, this act of love for God procures their pardon. Accordingly, one who has never been baptized can acquire the state of sanctifying grace in this manner as soon as he has come to a sufficient knowledge of God; and doubtless there are many non-Christians who receive the supernatural life by means of this baptism of desire. Of course, one who knows of the obligation to receive the sacrament of Baptism must have the intention of doing so without delaying too long, if he wishes to partake of the sanctifying benefit of an act of love for God.

The Catholic doctrine of the necessity of Baptism encounters a difficulty in the fact that multitudes of infants die without being baptized. Some are deprived of this salutary sacrament because their parents are neglectful, others because they are born in a pagan land, others because natural causes prevent their being baptized, as is particularly the case with still-born infants. Now, since children below the age of reason cannot be sanctified by the baptism of desire, the Catholic doctrine of the necessity of Baptism seems to imply that God is unjust in excluding these little ones from the happiness of heaven and punishing them for all eternity, even though they have committed no personal sin. Such, at least, is an objection frequently raised.

However, such an objection arises either from a misunderstanding of the Catholic doctrine of the eternal fate of unbaptized infants or from a false notion of man's right to the happiness of heaven. As to the first, the Catholic Church does not teach that these children *will suffer consciously* in the next life. It is indeed sound Catholic doctrine that those who depart this life with original sin on their souls are excluded forever from heaven, even though they have no actual sin. At the same time, Catholic theologians commonly teach that the little ones of whom we are speaking will not *feel* any sorrow over the deprivation of the supernatural happiness of the beatific vision, and will enjoy for all eternity a high degree of natural happiness. As to the second point, since the supernatural life of grace and glory is a free gift of God to which no human being has a strict right until the merits

of Christ have been applied to him, God is guilty of no injustice in not granting it to children who die without Baptism. The Almighty has indeed through His divine Son instituted Baptism as a general means of salvation, applicable to all; but He is not obliged to invert the laws of nature or to over-ride men's free will in order to provide this sacrament to each individual child.

Nevertheless, the infant who dies after being baptized is immeasurably more fortunate than one who dies unbaptized. Hence the Church is most anxious to procure the speedy baptism of little ones, and Catholic parents are commanded by ecclesiastical law to have their children baptized as soon as possible after birth (Canon 770). Apart from some exceptional reason a child should not be kept without Baptism more than two weeks. Of course, an infant in danger of death should be baptized immediately, irrespective of the will of the parents.

It is opportune to mention in this connection a view held by some Catholic theologians concerning children born in lands where Christianity has not yet been preached, such as certain parts of Asia and Africa. In these countries before Christ established Baptism sanctifying grace was conferred on children when they received the rite of purification given in one form or another among all peoples, and derived ultimately from God's revelation to mankind in the beginnings of the human race. Now, according to the theologians just mentioned, these pre-Christian rites retain their power to give grace to infants in each particular region until the Gospel has been announced

there. According to this view, little ones who die in denighted pagan lands are eternally saved if they have received the rite of purification in use among their people. This view does not indeed represent the mind of the majority of theologians, who believe that Baptism is now the only rite that will remit original sin for an infant in any part of the earth; yet it is a truly probable opinion.

Some Christians, notably the Baptists, claim that children under the age of reason cannot be baptized because they are incapable of making an act of faith, and Christ demanded faith on the part of those receiving this sacrament, when He said: "He that *believeth* and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark xvi. 16). Against this argument, however, we have our Lord's clear statement that Baptism is a necessary means of salvation for *all*—"unless a man (that is, *anyone*) be born again of water, etc."—and surely Christ would not leave little children, so dear to Him, incapable of receiving a means necessary for their salvation. The fact that they cannot make an act of faith does not limit God's power to give them grace. Evidently then, when Christ said that one must *believe* and be baptized, He was demanding faith only from those to whom the Apostles were to preach and who could make an act of faith—that is, persons having the use of reason.

The custom of baptizing infants dates from the early centuries. The scriptural accounts of the baptism of whole households by St. Paul (Acts xvi. 15, 33; 1 Corinthians i. 16) furnish a probable argument that the Apostles baptized little ones, for it is most

likely that there were some children in these households. In the second century St. Irenaeus asserted that through Christ all are reborn—"infants and little ones and children and youths and adults" (*Adversus Haereses*, ii. 22). In the next century Origen wrote: "The Church has received from the Apostles the tradition of giving Baptism even to children" (*In Epist. ad Rom.*, v. 9). And so, the Catholic practice of baptizing infants comes down from apostolic times. It is true, in the fourth and fifth centuries Catholic parents sometimes deferred the baptism of their children for several years—at times even to adult age—in order that they could better appreciate the benefits of this sacrament. But the Church never gave approval to this custom; and it certainly does not argue that children *cannot* be baptized, since even in those times an infant in danger of death was at once baptized.

To receive Baptism validly a person who has attained to the use of reason must have the intention, or will, to receive it; for God does not sanctify one who is able to co-operate with divine grace without his own consent. To receive Baptism fruitfully—that is, to obtain its graces—one who has come to the age of reason must make an act of faith, accepting all that God has revealed because He can neither deceive nor be deceived. Such a person must know explicitly at least two truths of the Christian revelation—that there is a God and that He rewards and punishes men according to their dues. It is probable that two other doctrines must also be explicitly known—the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation. Of course, when an adult is baptized in the Catholic Church under normal cir-

cumstances he is first instructed in these and many other doctrines. Finally, to receive the graces of Baptism one who has reached the age of reason must intend to live as a good Christian, and must repent from a supernatural motive of any mortal sins he may have committed.

Unlike most of the sacraments, Baptism does not require the service of a priest for its valid administration. Our Lord has decreed that it can be given by anyone capable of performing the essential rite and of having the intention to administer it. This is indeed a striking proof of Christ's tender love for souls, since it can often happen that there is urgent need of Baptism and no priest is at hand. From the *Acts of the Apostles* we know that the priestly power is not required in the minister of Baptism, since the Deacon Philip baptized (Acts viii). That a lay person can baptize, even though himself not a Catholic or a Christian, is known from tradition. St. Jerome wrote: "If necessity urges, we know that even laics may baptize" (*Dial. adv. Lucif.*, n. 9). In 1439 the Council of Florence declared: "In case of necessity, not only a priest or a deacon, but even a lay man or woman, indeed even a pagan or a heretic, can baptize, provided he observes the form laid down by the Church and intends to do what the Church does."

Solemn Baptism, accompanied by all the ceremonies described above (page 15), is to be administered ordinarily by a bishop or a priest, but for a good reason it can be given by a deacon. Moreover, even private Baptism, without these ceremonies, may be given lawfully by a lay person only when an ordained

minister cannot be had and there is urgent need of the sacrament.

The person administering Baptism must have the intention of giving this sacrament, at least contained in the general purpose of doing what the Church does by this ceremony. Even one who does not acknowledge the sacred character and the efficacy of Baptism can have such an intention. Thus, a non-Christian doctor can baptize a dying child of Catholic parents with the requisite intention inasmuch as he wishes to give the little one the sacred rite which the Catholic Church administers to children. However, when it is possible, a Catholic should be chosen to give Baptism in preference to a non-Catholic. The father or mother of the recipient should not confer the sacrament if another Catholic capable of baptizing is at hand. Every Catholic should be familiar with the method of baptizing, which can be stated briefly as follows: *Pour water on the forehead of the recipient in sufficient quantity to flow, and while pouring say distinctly and audibly: "I baptize thee in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."*

Questions

1. How can we prove that Baptism is necessary for salvation?
2. Explain the two ways by which a person can receive the supernatural life of grace in certain circumstances without the sacrament of Baptism.
3. What is to be said of infants who die without Baptism?

4. Explain the obligation of Catholic parents to have their children baptized as soon as possible.
5. Explain the view of some theologians regarding children born in pagan lands.
6. What is the chief argument against infant Baptism, and how is it answered?
7. What conditions are required from one who has reached the age of reason for the valid and fruitful reception of Baptism?
8. How do we know that anyone having the use of reason can baptize validly?
9. Who may baptize solemnly? Who may baptize privately?
10. State briefly but adequately the way of administering Baptism.

IV. THE GRACES OF BAPTISM

The first effect of Baptism is a character. This is a spiritual quality impressed on the soul—probably on the intellectual faculty. This character is not perceptible to human beings in the present life, but is visible to God and to the angels and saints, distinguishing one who has been baptized from those who have never received the sacrament of spiritual regeneration, as a soldier is distinguished from civilians by his uniform. Catholic theologians teach that the sacramental character gives a share in the priestly power of Christ Himself. Of course, the perfection of the priestly power available to men is given only by the sacrament of Holy Orders; yet it is given in a limited degree by Baptism, so that in the broad sense all baptized persons are priests. St. Peter was referring to this truth when he wrote: "You are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood" (1 Peter ii. 9). It should be noted that this character is conferred only by the *sacrament* of Baptism, not by the baptism of blood or the baptism of desire.

The baptismal character does not of itself sanctify the recipient. Indeed, it is possible for a person who has attained to the use of reason to be baptized truly—because he has the intention of receiving the sacrament—and accordingly to receive the character, but at the same time not to receive any grace because he has no contrition for his sins. Such a person is said to receive Baptism *validly* but *unfruitfully*. Again, one who has received Baptism both validly and fruitfully but later falls into mortal sin loses the grace of the sacrament but retains its character. In fact,

it is the common view of theologians that the character remains on the soul for all eternity, whether its final abode is heaven or hell—"for the glory of the good and for the disgrace of the wicked," as St. Thomas expresses it (*Summa*, P. III, Q. 63, a. 5, ad 3).

The character makes the recipient a member of the true Church of Christ—that is, the Catholic Church. By his incorporation in the Church a baptized person receives certain privileges and incurs certain obligations. Thus, only a baptized person can gain indulgences. But the chief privilege attached to the baptismal character is the capacity to receive the other sacraments. An unbaptized person might go through the ceremony of receiving another sacrament, such as Confirmation or Penance, and the bishop or priest might in all good faith administer to him the sacramental rite, but no sacrament would actually be received because of the absence of the baptismal character. And it must be noted that this capacity to receive the other sacraments validly is annexed to the baptismal character even when the baptized person is separated from the Catholic Church. For even in this case he is a quasi-member of the Church by reason of the indelible character.

The chief duty incumbent on a baptized person is the obligation to obey the laws of the Catholic Church. Even those baptized in a non-Catholic denomination are truly Catholics until they deliberately accept heretical doctrine, and they, too, always remain under the jurisdiction of the Church in spiritual matters and are subject to ecclesiastical legislation in as far as the Church intends to bind them. Some laws are extended to all baptized persons without excep-

tion, while others are meant only for Catholics. Thus, the law forbidding, under pain of nullity, marriage within the third degree of blood relationship applies to all baptized persons; but the obligation to have marriage celebrated before a priest and two witnesses does not hold when both parties have been baptized and brought up outside the Church.

In a word, Catholics believe that by the very reception of Baptism a person becomes subject to the authority of the Catholic Church. Even in the extreme case when the sacrament has been conferred in defiance of the Church's own laws—as would happen if a person baptized an infant of non-Christian parents against their will outside the danger of death—even in such a case the recipient is brought under the jurisdiction of the Church. The basic reason is that by the will of God, the supreme Ruler of all creatures, those whose souls bear the baptismal character are members, or at least quasi-members of the Church of Christ, and so must obey the Church's laws. We have an analogous case in civil life. By the very fact that a person is born in a certain country he becomes subject to its legislation, whether he later wills it or not. Similarly, by the very fact that a person is spiritually born into the true Church by Baptism he comes under the Church's authority, whatever may be his own ideas or desires subsequently on the subject.

We distinguish two graces given by Baptism—sanctifying and sacramental. In reality, there is only supernatural quality infused into the soul, but since it has two distinct effects we speak of it as two distinct graces. Sanctifying grace gives the soul a resemblance

to God Himself, so that those in possession of this divine quality are said to be partakers of the divine nature. With the advent of sanctifying grace sin departs from the soul—original sin, and also, in the case of one who has come to the use of reason, actual sin. However, as was said previously, to obtain the pardon of actual sins one must have contrition for them. Imperfect contrition suffices with the reception of Baptism.

With sanctifying grace the soul receives the infused theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and also (according to the majority of theologians) infused moral virtues corresponding to the natural acquired virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Finally, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost are conferred, rendering the Christian docile to the inspirations of God. These virtues and gifts do not indeed become active in the soul of the baptized child before he comes to the age of reason, but when he reaches this stage these divine qualities are present in his soul to help him to be faithful to his duties.

The sacramental grace of Baptism is birth to the supernatural life. This is the grace proper to this particular sacrament, distinguishing its efficacy from the specific efficacy of the other sacraments. Before Baptism the soul was dead in sin, now it lives the life of grace, and the acquisition of this supernatural life is appropriately called spiritual birth. Joined to this special grace is a claim to the actual graces that will be needed subsequently by the baptized person in order to live up to the standard of virtue expected of one who is intimately united to Christ and is a member of His Church. And as long as a baptized person

remains in the state of sanctifying grace he retains this claim to actual graces, so that no matter how seriously he may be tempted he is sure to receive from God sufficient assistance to be loyal to his divine Master.

When a person receives the pardon of his actual sins through an act of contrition or through the reception of the sacrament of Penance he does not receive ordinarily the remission of all the *temporal* punishment due to them. This remains, even after the guilt of his sins has been taken away, and must be expiated either in the present life or in purgatory. But in His great mercy our Lord has decreed that one who has committed actual sins prior to Baptism shall receive through this sacrament not only the remission of the guilt but also the remission of all the punishment. For, since Baptism is the beginning of a new life, it is fitting that everything connected with the previous life of sin shall be blotted out. And so, even one who has been guilty of innumerable sins of a most heinous nature becomes as pure and innocent as the newly-baptized infant, if he receives Baptism with the proper contrition, and if he were to die immediately afterward without having offended God anew, he would pass at once to the joys of heaven.

Another manifestation of divine mercy is found in the power of Baptism to revive. If an adult receives this sacrament without the requisite faith and contrition, he does not obtain the life of grace. His soul remains in the darkness of sin. But if afterward he elicits the necessary acts of faith and contrition, the Baptism revives—that is, its graces are then bestowed on his soul just as he would have received them at the time of

the actual reception had he been properly disposed. Of course, any sins committed by such a person after Baptism must be submitted to the tribunal of Penance.

Truly, it is an inestimable privilege to have been born to the life of grace through Baptism. Those who have received this sacrament in infancy are liable to neglect their duty of thanking the Almighty for this great blessing. If we celebrate our birthdays as occasions of happiness, why should we not celebrate even more joyously the anniversaries of our birth to the life of grace? When we look around us and see so many millions of human beings immersed in the darkness of unbelief and paganism, we should be moved to thank God from the depths of our heart that we are numbered among the fortunate ones who have been born again of water and the Holy Ghost.

Questions

1. Explain the nature of the character Baptism gives.
2. What is the difference between the valid and the fruitful reception of Baptism?
3. What are the chief privileges annexed to the baptismal character?
4. What are the chief obligations of the baptized?
5. What is the basis of the Church's authority over the baptized?
6. Explain sanctifying grace and its qualities.
7. Explain the sacramental grace of Baptism.
8. What is to be noted about the temporal punishment due to sins forgiven in Baptism?
9. Explain the revival of Baptism.
10. Why should we be grateful for the privilege of having received Baptism?

