

Article

The Pedagogical and Religious Dimensions of the Rites of the Sacrament of Children's Baptism

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Abstract: The topic of the article “The Pedagogical and Religious Dimensions of the Rites of the Sacrament of Baptism for Children” deals with the sacraments in the Catholic Church, particularly baptism as the first of the seven sacraments. As signs, sacraments are also meant to instruct, and indeed they do, for the meaning and grace of baptism are made clear in the rites of its celebration. Union with Christ leads to confession of faith in the One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The profession of faith, closely related to baptism, is eminently Trinitarian. The Church baptises: “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28,19), the Triune God to whom the Christian entrusts his life. The basis for analyzing the rites of baptism will be the Order of Baptism for Children during mass, which contains very important instructions that can be grouped into three points: (1) instructions about God the Father, (2) instructions about the essence of baptism and its importance for the parish and the baptized, (3) instructions about the duties of the baptized and their parents and godparents. In the sacraments God occupies the central place, and the sacrament of baptism, by instructing about God the Father, the first issue, brings closer three fundamental truths about God: (a) God's initiative in the salvation for man, (b) God's omnipotence (universal, loving and mysterious), and (c) God's goodness. The second issue deals with: (a) the essence of baptism based on the terms given in the Rite of Receiving the Children (baptism, faith, the grace of Christ, admission to the Church, and eternal life); (b) the meaning of infant baptism for the parish community; and (c) the meaning of baptism for the child. Likewise, the third issue is also divided into two parts, with an instruction (a) on the duties of the baptized and (b) the duties of baptized children, parents and godparents.

Keywords: baptism; God; values; community; parish; duties; parents of the child receiving baptism; godparents



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1. Introduction

Ongoing rapid social and cultural changes have negatively impacted the religiosity of the young generation of Poles. In the last decade, the number of sacramental marriages has dropped significantly; meanwhile, there is a specific fashion for informal partnerships. What was socially unapproved a dozen years ago has now become almost the norm, accepted by one's parents, closest family members, friends and colleagues. Moral relativism, which is upheld not only by young people but also by the older generation, is taking its toll. Many followers of Christ willingly admit their faith, yet at the same time they do not obey almost any Christian standards, neither evangelical, doctrinal nor moral (Slotwińska 2019).

An example of such behavior that the Church has to deal with is the baptism of infants born into non-sacramental relationships. It is becoming common practice that young people do not conclude the sacrament of marriage despite the absence of impediments, and at the same time necessarily request the baptism of their children. This is an example of either extreme hypocrisy or a lack of elementary knowledge of what the sacrament of baptism is. It is surprising that the overwhelming majority of priests willingly agree to administer this sacrament, although they know very well that the promise they made during a baptism to

raise a child in the faith has little chance of taking place, since the parents themselves, often also godparents, live in sin and have no consideration for God's commandments.

Perhaps it is high time for the Polish Episcopate to undertake corrective measures that will stimulate moral renewal and contribute to the spiritual revival of the young generation of believers in the Catholic Church (DC 2020, p. 288). Before this happens, however, I would like to show, in this study, the importance, power and beauty of this most important sacrament in its various dimensions. I consciously use the term "most important sacrament" because without the sacrament of baptism the other six sacraments cannot be administered (DC 2020, p. 70):

Christ instituted the sacraments of the new law. [. . .] The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of Christian life: they give birth and increase, healing and mission to a Christian's life of faith. There is thus a certain resemblance between the stages of natural life and the stages of spiritual life. (cf. CCC 1992, p. 1210)

Baptism, the foundation of all Christian life, the gateway to the life in the Spirit and the gateway to other sacraments, frees the baptized from sin, making them children of God and members of Christ, and instills them in the Church, and so we become partakers in her mission (CCL 1983, can. 204, § 1; 849; CCC 1992, p. 1213). "Baptism is the sacrament of rebirth through water and in the Word" (CCC 1992, p. 1213). It occurs as the first sacrament of Christian initiation (I: baptism, confirmation, eucharist; II: penance and anointing of the sick; III: priesthood and marriage):

The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the body of Christ, and, finally, to give worship to God; because they are signs they also instruct. They not only presuppose faith, but by words and objects they also nourish, strengthen, and express it; that is why they are called "sacraments of faith". They do indeed impart grace, but, in addition, the very act of celebrating them most effectively disposes the faithful to receive this grace in a fruitful manner, to worship God duly, and to practice charity. (SC 1963, p. 59)

This text, from the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, emphasizes the theological, pedagogical and religious dimensions of the sacraments. These two dimensions are very closely related. The subject of this article focuses on the pedagogical and religious dimensions of the first sacrament, baptism. This, in turn, requires taking into account the statements from the Catechism of the Catholic Church, which emphasize that "the meaning and grace of the sacrament of baptism are seen in the rites of its celebration. By following the gestures and words of this celebration with attentive participation, the faithful are initiated into the riches this sacrament signifies and brings about in each newly baptized person" (CCC 1992, p. 34).

Thus, the pedagogical and religious dimensions of the sacrament of baptism form the rite, consisting of acts and words for its celebration. By attentively participating in them, the faithful will know "what this sacrament means and what it brings about" in those who receive it (CCC 1992, p. 1334). The basis for the analysis of the rite of baptism will be the Order of Baptism for Children (OBC 1994, pp. 80–94), which contains many very important instructions, namely about: (1) God the Father, (2) the essence of baptism and its importance for the parish church and the baptized, and (3) the duties of the baptized, their parents and godparents.

2. Teachings about God the Father

God the Father is the source and goal of the entire liturgy of the Church (cf. CCC 1992, p. 1077). Hence, He occupies a central place in the liturgy of the sacraments, including baptism, which praises Him as the Father making the baptized his children. Three truths are emphasized: (a) God's initiative in the work of human salvation, (b) God's omnipotence and (c) God's goodness.

A. In the history of salvation, God in dialogue with man always appears as the first person acting as the initiator of salvation. The first word of God spoken to a newborn child is the word “love”, cleansing him or her of original sin and making the newborn His adopted child. On the other hand, the liturgical sign that expresses this truth about God’s initiative concerning man’s salvation is the procession of the celebrant, with the assistant, representing God, leading from the altar to the front door of the church. Here the celebrant teaches that God, whose gift is a child, now wants to give him the gift of “his life of grace” (OBC 1994, p. 112).

B. God’s omnipotence, as the only one of His attributes, stands for the symbol of faith, as noted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. It adds that “to confess this power has great bearing on our lives. We believe that his might is *universal*, for God who created everything (cf. Gen 1:1; John 1:3) also rules everything and can do everything. God’s power is loving, for he is our Father (Cf. Matt 6:9), and *mysterious*, for only faith can discern it when it ‘is made perfect in weakness’” (2 Cor 1: 9; CCC 1992, p. 268).

The call to “God, the Father almighty”, emphasizing the faith of parents and godparents, the fatherhood of God, and His creation of heaven and earth, are found in the Confession of Faith (OBC 1994, p. 135). By taking part in this activity, parents and godparents profess their faith in the universal omnipotence of God (they confirm that they believe in “God [...] almighty”) as loving (they confirm that they believe in God *the Father* almighty) and mysterious (when asked, “Do they believe...?” they confirm that they believe).

In the Rite of Baptism for Children, the instruction about all three attributes of God’s omnipotence is found in the Prayer of the Faithful (OBC 1994, p. 125), along with an exorcism (OBC 1994, p. 127 A and B), and in the prayer for anointing with Holy Chrism (OBC 1994, p. 139).

The recognition of God’s universal omnipotence is already found in His definition as “Almighty”, “Creator of Heaven and Earth” and “Creator of the World”. God’s loving omnipotence manifests itself in calling Him “Father”, “Merciful” and “Good”. The faith necessary to recognize the omnipotence of the mysterious God in the celebrant is contained in the text he offers. This presents specific requests, and the faithful confirm this text with their requests and “Amen”. In prayers containing requests, the most numerous represent teaching and faith in God’s loving omnipotence, in requests for mercy, to join the community of the Church, for boldly confessing Christ, for growing in grace, for abiding in one faith and love, to save the world from hunger, fire and war, to be delivered from original sin, to make them His temple and others (OBC 1994, p. 125).

C. God’s goodness is emphasized in the Catechism of the Catholic Church in many places. The first point of the “Introduction” states that “God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life” (CCC 1992, p. 1).

In the prayer for blessing the water, the liturgy for the baptism for children calls God “the infinitely good Father”. Next, God is worshiped for what He has already done for people through baptism, namely: He gave them, and occupies a central place in, their new life as God’s children, united them in Christ into one people, and gave them freedom. At the end of this prayer there is a request for the blessing of the water so “that those baptized with it may receive eternal life” (OBC 1994, p. 132).

The goodness of God is shown in the introduction to the Prayer of the Faithful, in the request “for mercy for these children who are to be baptized, for their parents and godparents and all the baptized” (OBC 1994, p. 125). Moreover, the goodness of God is also confirmed by seven different requests in this prayer. In praying the exorcism, the same theme of God’s goodness is in the plea to God, in the words that He “set these children free from original sin, making them His temple and house of the Holy Spirit” (OBC 1994, p. 127 A), and that a humble request to God for deliverance from original sin (...), be strengthened by Christ’s grace and constantly guarded on their path of life (OBC 1994, p. 127 B). In turn, in the Rite of Anointing with Holy Chrism, the celebrant first recalls God’s blessings that the baptized children received. It then lists the benefits that they receive along with the

anointment with the “chrism of salvation”, meaning it includes them in the people of God, the fruit of which will be perseverance “in union with Christ the Priest, Prophet and King for eternal life” (OBC 1994, p. 139).

3. The Essence of Baptism and Its Importance for the Parish and the Baptized

The topic of the second point will be presented in three groups on the following themes:

1. The essence of baptism as contained in the terms given in the Rite of Accepting Children;
2. The importance of children’s baptism for the community of the parish church and the baptized child;
3. The responsibilities of the baptized, their parents and godparents.

3.1. The Essence of Baptism According to the Definitions Contained in the Rite of Receiving Children

The celebrant welcomes those present, especially the parents and godparents, recalling the joy with which they have welcomed their child, a gift from God, who now wants to give them an even greater gift, which is God’s life of grace (cf. OBC 1994, p. 112). Next, the celebrant speaks with the parents and asks them the question: “What are you asking the Church of God for your child?” In addition to the answer “for baptism”, the parents can answer: “for faith”, or “for the grace of Christ”, or “for admission to the Church”, or “for eternal life”. All answers express the essence of baptism (OBC 1994, p. 113).

(a) By answering that they are asking for baptism (Greek *baptizein*—to immerse in water), the parents of the child claim and emphasize that they are asking for the child to be immersed in the water of baptism, which is a symbol of burying him or her in Christ’s death, from which they arise through resurrection with Him as a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; CCC 1992, p. 1214). A strong foundation for this truth is the teaching of St. Paul:

Or are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in the newness of life. (Rom 6: 3–4; cf. Col 2:12)

Throughout the history of salvation, God prepared water to express the grace of baptism: at the beginning of the world, God’s Spirit hovered over the waters (Gen 1: 1–2), giving them the power to sanctify. The waters of the flood put an end to vices and gave rise to virtues, becoming a symbol of rebirth. The Israelites were freed from the captivity of the pharaoh after walking on the dry bottom of the Red Sea (Ex 13,17–14,31), which became part of the image of the future baptized community. Jesus Christ was baptized in the waters of the Jordan and thus anointed with the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:13–17; Cf. Mark 1:9f; Luke 3:21f; John 1:31–34). Blood and water flowed from the side of Christ, who died on the cross (John 19:33–35; see OBC 1994, p. 54 A). Christ, by ordering his disciples to baptize, allowed them to bestow people with the great blessing of being born again in water and the Holy Spirit, to be born to a new life as a child of God and entering the kingdom of God.

(b) In another answer of the child’s parents to the celebrant’s question as to what they are asking for, the word “baptism” can be replaced with the word “faith”. This teaches that baptism is a sacrament of faith necessary for salvation. The necessity of faith for baptism was clearly emphasized by Jesus Christ after His resurrection, in His last missionary command to the apostles: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:15–16). After Pentecost, the apostles and their associates, strengthened by his power, baptized everyone who believed in Christ. (Acts 2:41 *First Conversion of the Jews*; 8:12–13 *Philip in Samaria*; 10:48; 16:14–15; Cf. CCC 1992, p. 1226; Acts 16:30–34).

The closeness between baptism and faith is confirmed by the fact that the parents, children and godparents, and all those present confess their faith before the baptism of the child (OBC 1994, pp. 135–36). This declaration of the faith should make everyone realize just how great a treasure is God’s gift of faith, which the celebrant will confirm at the end, stating that its confession “is our pride...” (OBC 1994, p. 136). Faith, therefore, is inseparable from baptism, which is “in a special way a sacrament of faith because it is the sacrament of entry into the life of faith” (CCC 1992, p. 1236).

(c) The next possible request from the parents for the baptism of their child calls this sacrament “the grace of Christ”. This teaches us that baptism is the greatest grace for human beings due to the death and resurrection of Christ (OBC 1994, p. 47-C: This is a plea for “the children who are to receive the grace of holy baptism . . . to be justified by the grace of Jesus Christ” *Introduction and the fourth point of the Prayer of the Faithful*). The catechism extends this title for baptism to many rites, stressing that “the meaning and grace of the sacrament of baptism are clearly seen in the rites of its celebration...” (CCC 1992, p. 1234). An example of this is the sign of the cross, which “marks with the imprint of Christ . . . and signifies the grace of the redemption Christ won for us by his cross” (CCC 1992, p. 1235).

(d) Another possibility for asking for baptism is given by the request “for acceptance into the Church”. This phrase is given in the analyzed Rite of Baptism for Children: “Furthermore, baptism is the sacrament by which human beings are incorporated into the Church and are built up together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit”. This is shown in “the very celebration of the sacrament in the Latin liturgy . . . [made] clear when the baptized are anointed with Chrism, in the presence of the people of God” (OBC 1994, General Introduction, no. 4). This theme is also emphasized by the catechism, which states:

Baptism makes us members of the Body of Christ: “Therefore we are members of one another” (Eph 4:25). Baptism incorporates us *into the Church*. From the baptismal fonts is born the one people of God of the New Covenant, which transcends all the natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races, and sexes: “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body”. (1 Cor 12:13; CCC 1992, p. 1267)

Acceptance into the Church as a name for baptism is confirmed by the requests mentioned in the Prayer of the Faithful and the Celebrant’s Prayer at the anointment with Holy Chrism (OBC 1994, 47 A-1; B-1; E-2; 62; 139 another name for “acceptance into the Church” is “belonging to the people of God”).

(e) Finally, the parents’ response to the celebrant’s question is also justified by the following: “What are you asking of the Church of God for your child?” They answer that they are asking “for eternal life”. The person who is baptized thus receives the right to heaven. This is confirmed by numerous passages included in the Order of Baptism for Children, namely, the General Introduction (OBC 1994, p. 6), biblical texts (OBC 1994, pp. 208: Ez 36:28, 223: John 6:47, 221: John 3:1–6, 210: Rom 6:3–5, 211: Rom 8:28–32), requests during the Prayer of the Faithful (OBC 1994, 47 C-4; OBC 47 E-1), the Prayer of Blessing the Water (OBC 1994, 54 C), the Prayer of Anointing with Holy Chrism (OBC 1994, pp. 62, 139) and the Prayer for Blessing (OBC 1994, 70 A). In addition, it is worth noting that writing the child’s name in the Book of Baptisms is a sign confirming that it was written in heaven in the “Book of Life”. The second important point cautions against committing sins, as they can cause the baptized to be erased from the “Book of Life” and lose their promised place in heaven.

All of the above-discussed answers to the celebrant’s question, “What are you asking the Church of God for (name)?”—“for baptism”, “for faith”, “for the grace of Christ”, “for acceptance into the Church”, or “for eternal life”—make clear and demonstrate the wealth that this sacrament signifies and brings about.

3.2. The Importance of Children’s Baptism for the Community, Parish and Child

(a) The importance of children’s baptism for the parish

Baptism, in addition to giving the greatest values to the child, also gives the parish more people, and together with this gift, this community has joy. That the enlarged parish experiences joy through baptism makes it welcome its new member with love. This is confirmed by the song that accompanies the procession to the door of the Church (OBC 1994, p. 111).

The texts of the Old Testament combined singing and joy to highlight important political or religious events. For example, after the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, “Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: I will sing to the LORD, for he is gloriously triumphant; horse and chariot he has cast into the sea” (Ex 15:1–21).

On David’s return after striking down the Philistine, women came from all the cities of Israel to meet Saul the king, singing and dancing, with tambourines, joyful songs, and stringed instruments. The women played and sang: “Saul has slain his thousands, David his tens of thousands” (1 Sam 18:6–7). Similarly, when the Ark of God was brought from the house of Abinadab to Jerusalem, “David and all the house of Israel danced before the LORD with all their might, with singing, and with lyres, harps, tambourines, sistrums, and cymbals” (2 Sam 6:5). Singing, and especially the singing the psalms, emphasized both the joyful nature of serving God (see 1 Chron 6:16; 25:6–7; 2 Chron 23:13; 23:18; Neh 12:8; 1 Macc 4:54; Ps 2:14, 30:5, 66:4, 81:2–4) and the piety of the people of the Old Testament (see Ps 7:18, 9:3, 12, 13:6, 33:2–3, 42:9, 59:18, 71:23, 92:2, 104:33) and the New Covenant. In his letter, the apostle James, giving various exhortations and warnings, among other things, wrote: “Is anyone in good spirits? He should sing praise” (James 5:13). The content of the “new song”—probably sung in a happy disposition—about which Revelation (5:9) speaks, is the praise of Christ for his redemptive work, which entitles one to open the book of destinies (Jankowski 1959, 171–172; Cf. Rev 14:3; 15:3). In the year 112, Pliny the Younger wrote that “during the liturgy, Christians expressed their faith in joyful hymns ... Christians sing in honor of Christ as if in honor of God (*Carmen Christo quasi Deodocere*)” (Leon-Dufour 1986, pp. 605–6).

St. Augustine pointed to singing as an expression of joy, unity and love when he said: “he who loves sings”. The truth that singing is an expression of the joy with which the Christian community now welcomes newly baptized infants is expressed by the celebrant before marking them with the sign of the cross (“Dear children, the Church of God receives you with great joy ...” OBC 1994, p. 117).

Thanks to its pedagogical and religious dimensions, baptism administered during the Holy Mass becomes a very important catechesis for those participating in it. We can speak here of liturgical catechesis, that is, catechesis for liturgy, through liturgy, and from liturgy (Igbekele 2021). It reminds Catholics of many important truths, both in word and action. Among them is the truth that they constitute a “royal priesthood, a holy nation and a people acquired by God for as His own;” that several or several dozen years ago they were also included in the community of the Church; that they should boldly confess Christ, because they became participants through baptism in the death and resurrection of Christ; that they should grow in grace as living members of the Church; that by participating in baptism they should renew the grace of their baptism so that, together with all Christ’s disciples, becoming one bread, they may remain in one faith and love; and that they may bring petitions to God “that He may save the world from hunger, fire and war”. These truths and obligations arise only from the Prayer of the Faithful during the baptismal rites. Thus, the entire rite of baptism, with its prayers, activities and symbolic signs, is a great call to review one’s Christian and Catholic life.

A child is conceived as a gift of God (OBC 1994, p. 112), and after birth and at baptism, God gives it “his life of grace”, and she or he becomes a full member of the Church. The truth that a child is a gift of God is proclaimed by the celebrant after greeting its parents and godparents (OBC 1994, p. 112). God, being the source of all life, after creating man blessed his fertility and assigned him the task of populating the earth (Genesis 1:28). However, by giving men and women the gift of sexuality and fertility, He reserved His presence in the use of these gifts to the process of bringing people to life.

This consists in the fact that God gives the right to such cooperation with Him only to those who, before the sexual act, were united with Him through the sacramental marriage union. The life passed on through the marriage act is the fruit of the action of three people: the father, mother and God the Creator. God has committed that whenever parents bring a child to life by giving it a material body, He will simultaneously breathe a rational and immortal soul into that body. In this way, the person brought to life will become, from the very first moment of its existence, a gift of God, an everlasting living being and a gift of God for its parents, community and homeland.

God gives “His life of grace” to this divine gift, a child, in the sacrament of holy baptism (OBC 1994, p. 112). The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that it is “God’s life of grace”, stating that in baptism, “all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin” (CCC 1992, p. 1263), “but also makes the neophyte “a new creature”, (2 Cor 5:17) an adopted son of God (cf. Gal 4:5–7), who has become a “partaker of the divine nature”, (2 Peter 1: 4) a member of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 6:15, 12:27) and co-heir with him (Rom 8:17), and a temple of the Holy Spirit” (cf. John 13:12–15, CCC 1992, p. 1265).

The fact that the child is given a name (OBC 1994, p. 113) proclaims the truth that the child not only belongs to the Church, but also becomes a full member of the Church after being baptized. A name is not only an accepted way to address a person or thing, but represents something about a person’s essence, what they bear or what a thing is. It defines one’s destiny, one’s tasks and the roles one has to fulfill in life. The angel Gabriel, announcing Mary’s selection to be the mother of the Savior, said:

Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. . . . Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. (Luke 1:31–33,35)

Thus, giving a name to the Messiah is related to recognizing His origin from the Father and the actions and tasks He was to perform. When God called everything into existence, He gave names even to the heavenly bodies (cf. Isa 40:26; Ps 147:4; Bar 3:33–35). When God changes someone’s name, it means that He is giving them a new personality and taking possession of it. This is what God did with Abraham (cf. Gen 17:5), Sarah (cf. Gen 17:15) and Jacob (cf. Gen 32:29). Christ did the same for Peter (cf. Matt 16:18–19).

Naming a child signifies their destiny, their hopes and their social opportunities. The custom of giving a name at baptism goes back to the first centuries. Receiving a name during the sacrament of baptism emphasizes the ability to enter into dialogue with God. From now on, God will call this child by name and wait for her or him to answer, and a person’s value depends on the intensity of their dialogue with God (Ślotwińska and Głowa 2001). It is also important to maintain a fruitful dialogue with the community of the parish church and with its presider, the parish priest.

A sign confirming that a candidate for baptism belongs to the Church is marking them with the sign of the cross (*signatio*)—“the sign of Jesus Christ, our Savior” (OBC 1994, p. 117). This gesture probably comes from Africa and refers to the practice of sealing or tattooing the forehead of soldiers with the sign of belonging to the ruler. St. Augustine compares the sign of the cross on the catechumen’s forehead to circumcision. Just as this sign made an Israelite belong to the chosen people, so the sign of the cross makes the baptized person belong to the Church community (“The sign of the Old Covenant—circumcision on a covered body; the sign of the New Covenant—the cross on the open forehead”. St. Augustine (1993), *Sermones* 160,6).

The same Father of the Church also states that this sign of the cross gives him or her the name of a Christian: “You are a Christian, you bear the cross of Christ on your forehead” (St. Augustine 1994, *Sermones* 302,3).

The sign of the cross on a child’s forehead is the seal that God marks on her or him as His own. Many times in the Apocalypse, St. John the Evangelist mentions the “seal of the

living God”, impressed on the foreheads of the chosen ones, signifying belonging to the eschatological community of the saved. Moreover, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, teaching about the sign of the cross on the forehead of a child, states that it “marks with the imprint of Christ the one who is going to belong to him and signifies the grace of the redemption Christ won for us by his cross” (CCC 1992, p. 1235).

The rite of “clothing with a white garment” (OBC 1994, p. 141) is very eloquent within the rites of baptism. In the Bible, a robe, like bread and wine, is a sign of blessing, and nakedness and hunger are symbols of a curse. A robe is also a symbol of the “world ordered” by God the Creator and also heralds the “regaining of the glory” lost in Paradise (Haulotte 1973). Hence, putting on the garment in the sacrament of baptism means removing nakedness, that is, a cursed state, and entering the world ordered by God and regaining the glory that the first parents lost in Paradise by committing original sin. In the sacrament of baptism, putting on a garment is also a symbol of “putting on Christ” (cf. Gal 3:26–28; cf. CCC 1992, p. 1243).

As the sacrament of enlightenment, baptism makes the child become a child of light who accepts the obligation to be “the light of the world”. This truth is spoken in the “handing on of a lighted candle” (OBC 1994, p. 142). By interpreting this sign, the celebrant teaches that it is a call “so that your children, enlightened by Christ, may walk always as children of the light and, persevering in the faith, may run to meet the Lord when he comes with all the Saints in the heavenly court” (OBC 1994, p. 142). The above truths about baptism are also conveyed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1243), which states that “the candle, lit from the Easter candle, signifies that Christ has enlightened the neophyte. In Him, the baptized are “the light of the world” (cf. Matt 5:14; Phil 2:15).

4. Duties of the Baptized, Their Parents and Godparents

4.1. Duties of the Baptized

The baptized person entering the Church, apart from receiving numerous rights (to receive the sacraments, to be nourished by the Word of God and to benefit from the spiritual help of the Church), also has obligations towards the People of God. Namely, these dictate that the baptized person belongs no longer to himself (1 Cor 6:19) but to Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:15); (s)he is called to submit to others (cf. Eph 5:21; 1 Cor 16:15–16), to serve them (cf. John 13:12–15) in the Church community, to “obey your leaders and defer to them” (Heb 13:17), surrounding them with respect and love (cf. 1 Thess 5:12–13; CCC 1992, p. 1269), that (s)he may confess to people their faith, which (s)he has received from God through the Church, and participate in the apostolic and missionary activity of the People of God (AD 1965, p. 7, 23; CCC 1992, p. 1270).

The sign of the cross on the forehead, the most exposed place on a person, obliges catechumens to bear witness that Christ was crucified out of love for people, for their salvation. (In one of the petitions in the prayer of the faithful, there is the following request to God for children: “We ask you that, marked with a holy cross, their lives may boldly confess Christ, the Son of God”. OBC 1994, p. 47 B.) It is a duty to follow Christ on the way of the cross, the way of renunciation and mortification, because only this path leads to the glory of the resurrection.

Furthermore, it should also be remembered that the sign of the cross, which is “the sign of Jesus Christ our Savior” (OBC 1994, p. 117) is the seal with which the baptized person is marked as God’s property. This property cannot be squandered or be appropriated to anyone else, because God will claim what belongs to Him in due time.

During the rite of Anointing with Holy Chrism the celebrant prays for the baptized to “remain members of Christ, Priest, Prophet and King unto eternal life” (OBC 1994, p. 139). At baptism, God first goes out with His grace to the baptized, delivering them from sin and giving them new birth from the water of the Holy Spirit, thus inviting them to cooperate in the preservation of goodness.

The need to preserve one’s “Christian dignity” and “bring it unstained into eternal life”, received in baptism, is stated in the special rite of “clothing with a white garment”

(OBC 1994, p. 141). White in the Bible is the color of light and life, a sign of festive joy, innocence and purity; it is the color denoting the beings accompanying God's glory, the heavenly beings, the transformed beings (cf. Ez 9:2; Luke 24:4; Acts 10:30; Rev 4:4); it is also the color of the Son of Man (cf. Rev 1:13f.), Christ: "His clothing was white as snow, the hair on his head like pure wool" (Dn 7:9). Giving the baptized person a white garment emphasizes that, being born again, (s)he already shares in the glory of heaven. It also calls him or her to a life of innocence and chastity.

The rite of Handing on a Lighted Candle consists of a sign (the lighting of candles for individual children from the paschal candle), and the words of the celebrant, who interprets this sign, saying, "Receive the light of Christ". In the next words, we learn that the children were enlightened during baptism by Christ and therefore that they should always act as children of the light. Moreover, the celebrant reminds the children's parents and godparents of their duty to keep this light alive, since their salvation depends on it. The words "Light of Christ" recall the Easter vigil, when the deacon, carrying the paschal candle lit from the fire, sings "the Light of Christ" three times.

Next, the faithful light their candles from the paschal candle to remember their baptism—the sacrament of enlightenment—and in doing so emphasize that the light of the Risen Christ enlightens all believers. God in His mercy "called us from darkness to His wonderful light" (cf. 1 Peter 2:4–5; 9–10; OBC 1994, p. 215). This call takes place at the moment of baptism, when "Christ has shone upon us" (Eph 5:14) and we are truly "enlightened" (Heb 6:4). By receiving this sacrament, Christians should live as "children of light" by drawing others to God. The same truth about baptism is conveyed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1243), stating that "the candle, lit from the Easter candle, signifies that Christ has enlightened the neophyte. In him the baptized are 'the light of the world'" (cf. Matt 5,14; Phil 2,15).

The many duties that are associated with being baptized require God's help to carry them out—hence the understandable and necessary requests contained in the Prayer of the Faithful to help baptized children be good witnesses of God (OBC 1994, p. 47 A-2; OBC 47 E-3; OBC 47 B-2; OBC 47 D-2; OBC 47 E-3).

4.2. Responsibilities of Parents and Godparents of Baptized Children

Already in the Rite of Receiving the Children, the celebrant makes the parents aware that they accept the obligation to educate their children in the faith. This faith should be manifested in works, especially in keeping God's commandments and loving God and one's neighbor (OBC 1994, p. 115). At the same time, the celebrant accepts the godparents' readiness to help the parents fulfill their educational obligation (OBC 1994, p. 116). However, since living according to God's commandments is difficult, appropriate prayers are made to God in the Prayer of the Faithful (OBC 1994, p. 47 D-4; OBC E-5).

To preserve "God's life from being contaminated by sin and its constant growth", children need their upbringing, apart from the commands and prohibitions, to be supported by the good example of their parents. The celebrant calls the parents to do this before renouncing evil and professing faith (OBC 1994, p. 133). Confirmation of the importance that parents and godparents live according to the faith is found in the Prayer of the Faithful (OBC 1994, pp. 47 A-4, 125).

This prayer, with its intentions, covers not only children receiving the sacrament of baptism, their loved ones and the entire Church, but the whole world. In this way, those gathered at the celebration of baptism fulfill their priestly function, which, moreover, is emphasized by the relevant texts in the above-mentioned prayer (OBC 1994, p. 125). Realizing the truth that baptism involves participating in the common priesthood should lead the participants to be grateful for the sacrament and desire to fulfill this priestly function, first of all, by transforming their lives from ones lived selfishly to lives "for others" (pro-existence) (Słotwińska 2017), and thus by taking greater care to properly participate in the eucharist (DC 2020, pp. 125, 232).

Children enlightened by Christ at baptism are prepared to “always walk as children of the light” until Christ comes again. It is the task of parents and godparents to maintain this light in baptized children because, among other things, their salvation depends on it. Such a task for parents and godparents is symbolized by the rite of Handing on of a Lighted Candle (OBC 1994, p. 142).

The analysis of the rites of baptism of children, in pedagogical and religious dimensions, revealed a wealth of tasks, challenges and activities that baptized children face as well as parents, godparents and the entire community of believers. The lack of knowledge of these basic truths means that the sacrament is often treated instrumentally or serves as an opportunity to meet with family and friends in order to gain material benefits. Many times in conversations with priests there is a problem and deep awkwardness concerning “how to refuse parents the baptism of their child”. Priests know perfectly well that the parents live in a non-sacramental relationship or have even received the sacrament of marriage but do not identify with their declared faith in any way and do not take part in religious life, thus giving no hope that they will raise their children as Catholics.

The Code of Canon Law, canon 868, paragraph 1 states: “For the infant to be baptized licitly” requires that “2. there must be a founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion; if such hope is altogether lacking, the baptism is to be delayed according to the prescripts of particular law after the parents have been advised about the reason” (CCL 1983, p. 868).

In addition, the Order of Baptism of Children, adapted to the customs of Polish dioceses in the theological and pastoral introduction, part II, Duties and activities in administering baptism (OBC 1994, pp. 4–7), clearly indicates how to proceed before, during and after administering this sacrament. Thus, pastors have a powerful weapon in the form of the Code of Canon Law and the Order of Baptism for Children, which clearly indicate that this sacrament cannot be administered thoughtlessly, to simply prevent someone from being exposed to bad opinions or comments from pseudo-followers of the Catholic Church. Therefore, it should also be postulated that the highest bodies in the Polish episcopate should issue a document that will regulate the above issues and at the same time contribute to courageous attitudes on the part of the clergy in order to properly and fairly treat this most important sacrament (because it is the first), without which the other six will not be granted.

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