

I. Ceremonies of Baptism

(from the Catechism of the Council of Trent)

Their Importance

It now remains to explain, clearly and concisely, what is to be taught concerning the prayers, rites, and ceremonies of this Sacrament. To rites and ceremonies may, in some measure, be applied what the Apostle says of the gift of tongues, that it is unprofitable to speak, unless the faithful understand. They present an image, and convey the signification of the things that are done in the Sacrament; but if the people do not understand the force and meaning of these signs, there is but little advantage derived from ceremonies. Pastors should take care, therefore, to make them understood and to impress the minds of the faithful with a conviction that, although ceremonies are not of absolute necessity, they are of very great importance and deserve great veneration. This the authority of those by whom they were instituted, who were, no doubt, the Apostles, and also the object of their institution, sufficiently prove. It is manifest that ceremonies contribute to the more religious and holy administration of the Sacraments, serve to place, as it were, before the eyes the exalted and inestimable gifts which they contain, and impress on the minds of the faithful a deeper sense of the boundless beneficence of God.

Three Classes of Ceremonies in Baptism

In order that the pastor's instructions may follow a certain plan and that the people may find it easier to remember his words, all the ceremonies and prayers which the Church uses in the administration of Baptism are to be reduced to three heads. The first comprehends such as are observed before coming to the baptismal font; the second, such as are used at the font; the third, those that usually follow the administration of the Sacrament.

Ceremonies That Are Observed Before Coming to The Font

Consecration of Baptismal Water

In the first place, then, the water to be used in Baptism should be prepared. The baptismal font is consecrated with the oil of mystic unction; not, however, at all times, but, according to ancient usage, only on certain feasts, which are justly deemed the greatest and the most holy solemnities in the year. The water of Baptism was consecrated on the vigils of those feasts; and on those days alone, except in cases of necessity, it was also the practice of the ancient Church to administer Baptism. But although the Church, on account of the dangers to which life is continually exposed, has deemed it expedient to change her discipline in this respect, she still observes with the greatest solemnity the festivals of Easter and Pentecost on which the baptismal water is to be consecrated.

The Person to Be Baptized Stands at The Church Door

After the consecration of the water the other ceremonies that precede Baptism are next to be explained. The persons to be baptized are brought or conducted a to the door of the church and are strictly forbidden to enter, as unworthy to be admitted into the house of God, until they have cast off the yoke of the most degrading servitude and devoted themselves unreservedly to Christ the Lord and His most just authority.

Catechetical Instruction

The priest then asks what they demand of the Church; and having received the answer, he first instructs them in the doctrines of the Christian faith, of which a profession is to be made in Baptism. This the priest does in a brief catechetical instruction, a practice which originated, no doubt, in the precept of our Lord addressed to His Apostles: *Go ye into the whole world, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.* From this command, we may learn that Baptism is not to be administered until, at least, the principal truths of our religion are explained. But as the catechetical form consists of many interrogations, if the person to be instructed be an adult, he himself answers; if an infant, the sponsor answers for him according to the prescribed form and makes the solemn promise.

The Exorcism

The exorcism comes next in order. It consists of words of sacred and religious import and of prayers, and is used to expel the devil, to weaken and crush his power.

The Salt

To the exorcism are added other ceremonies, each of which, being mystical, has its own clear signification. When, for instance, salt is put into the mouth of the person to be baptized, this evidently means that, by the doctrines of faith and by the gift of grace, he shall be delivered from the corruption of sin, shall experience a relish for good works, and shall be delighted with the food of divine wisdom.

The Sign of The Cross

Next his forehead, eyes, breast, shoulders and ears are signed with the sign of the cross, to declare, that by the mystery of Baptism, the senses of the person baptized are opened and strengthened, to enable him to receive God, and to understand and observe His Commandments.

The Saliva

His nostrils and ears are next touched with spittle, and he is then immediately admitted to the baptismal font. By this ceremony we understand that, as sight was given to the blind man mentioned in the Gospel, whom the Lord after He had spread clay on his eyes commanded to wash them in the waters of Siloe, so through the efficacy of holy Baptism a light is let in on the mind, which enables it to discern heavenly truth.

The Ceremonies Observed After Coming to The Font

After the performance of these ceremonies the persons to be baptized approach the baptismal font, at which are performed other rites and ceremonies which present a summary of the Christian religion.

The Renunciation of Satan

Three distinct times the person to be baptized is asked by the priest: *Dost thou renounce Satan, and all his works, and all his pomps?* To each of which he, or the sponsor in his name, replies, I renounce. Whoever, then, purposes to enlist, under the standard of Christ, must first of all, enter

into a sacred and solemn engagement to renounce the devil and the world, and always to hold them in utter detestation as his worst enemies.

The Profession of Faith

Next, standing at the baptismal font, he is interrogated by the priest in these words: *Dost thou believe in God, the Father Almighty?* To which he answers: *I believe.* Being similarly questioned on the remaining Articles of the Creed, he solemnly professes his faith. These two promises contain, it is clear, the sum and substance of the law of Christ.

The Wish to Be Baptized

When the Sacrament is now about to be administered, the priest asks the candidate if he wishes to be baptized. After an answer in the affirmative has been given by him, or, if he is an infant, by the sponsor, the priest immediately performs the salutary ablution, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. As man, by yielding the assent of his will to the wicked suggestions of Satan, fell under a just sentence of condemnation; so God will have none enrolled in the number of His soldiers but those whose service is voluntary, that by a willing obedience to His commands they may obtain eternal salvation.

The Ceremonies That Follow Baptism

Chrism

After the person has been baptized, the priest anoints the crown of his head with chrism, thus giving him to understand, that from that day he is united as a member to Christ, His Head, and engrafted on His body; and that he is, therefore, called a Christian from Christ, as Christ is so called from chrism. What the chrism signifies, the prayers then offered by the priest, as St. Ambrose observes, sufficiently explain.

The White Garment

On the person baptized the priest then puts a white garment saying: *Receive this white garment, which mayest thou carry unstained before the judgment-seat of our Lord Jesus Christ; that thou mayest have eternal life.* Instead of a white garment, infants, because not formally dressed, receive a white cloth, accompanied by the same words. According to the teaching of the Fathers this symbol signifies the glory of the resurrection to which we are born by Baptism, the brightness and beauty with which the soul, when purified from the stains of sin, is invested in Baptism, and the innocence and integrity which the person who has received Baptism should preserve throughout life.

The Lighted Candle

A lighted taper is then put into the hand of the baptized to signify that faith, inflamed by charity, which is received in Baptism, is to be fed and augmented by the exercise of good works.

The Name Given in Baptism

Finally, a name is given the person baptized. It should be taken from some person whose eminent sanctity has given him a place in the catalogue of the Saints. The similarity of name will stimulate each one to imitate the virtues and holiness of the Saint, and, moreover, to hope and pray that he who is the model for his imitation will also be his advocate and watch over the

safety of his body and soul. Wherefore those are to be reprov'd who search for the names of heathens, especially of those who were the greatest monsters of iniquity, to bestow upon their children. By such conduct they practically prove how little they regard Christian piety when they so fondly cherish the memory of impious men, as to wish to have their profane names continually echo in the ears of the faithful.

II. Ceremonies of Confirmation

It remains now briefly to glance at the rites and ceremonies used by the Catholic Church in the administration of this Sacrament; and pastors will understand the great advantages of this explanation, if they revert to what we already said on this subject under its proper head.

The Anointing of The Forehead

The forehead, then, of the persons to be confirmed is anointed with sacred chrism; for by this Sacrament the Holy Spirit infuses Himself into the souls of the faithful, and increases in them strength and fortitude to enable them, in the spiritual contest, to fight manfully and to resist their most wicked foes. Wherefore it is indicated that they are to be deterred by no fear or shame, the signs of which appear chiefly on the forehead, from the open confession of the name of Christ.

The Sign of The Cross

Besides, that mark by which the Christian is distinguished from all others, as the soldier is by certain badges, should be impressed on the more conspicuous part of the body.

Time When Confirmation Should Be Conferred

It has also been a matter of solemn religious observance in the Church of God that this Sacrament should be administered principally at Pentecost, because on that day especially were the Apostles strengthened and confirmed by the power of the Holy Ghost. By the recollection of this supernatural event the faithful should be admonished of the nature and magnitude of the mysteries contained in the sacred unction.

The Slap on The Cheek

The person when anointed and confirmed next receives a gentle slap on the cheek from the hand of the Bishop to make him recollect that, as a valiant combatant, he should be prepared to endure with unconquered spirit all adversities for the name of Christ.

The Pax

Lastly, the peace is given him, that he may understand that he has attained the fullness of divine grace and that peace which passeth all understanding.