

**(Baptism 111 Handout) Baptism in the Catholic Church:**

After Christ had raised from the dead more and more people wanted to be his followers. They wanted to become part of his Church. The Church was the baptised people who believed in Jesus, and who came together to celebrate the Eucharist each Sunday. This has been the case from the beginning. No one would think of missing the Eucharist, and consider themselves as his followers. This is also true today. No one can change this, and at the same time be a follower of Jesus. This is why we take the connection between Baptism and Eucharist so seriously. Jesus left us with no other option. If we want to be a follower of Jesus we are first baptised, and believe the Good News, and then we come together to celebrate the Eucharist on Sunday. This is the very minimal for the Christian, but of course there is so much more. We are to follow the will of God as enunciated by Jesus, and found in scripture. The very definition of a believer from the beginning was (1) a baptised person, (2) who celebrated the Eucharist every Sunday, and (3) who followed the will of God. No one may separate Faith and Baptism from the celebration of the Eucharist each Sunday. This is the will of God as preached by Christ, and practised from the time of the Resurrection. Church means the Assembled People of God -- the people who assemble for the Eucharist. We are not church if we do not assemble for the Eucharist like the early church.

We must ask how one became part of this church who met every Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist? The simple answer is Baptism. In the early church those who applied for Baptism were adults. They had a long preparation for Baptism as we all know. It took usually a year. During this year they could not join the community for Mass. They could only join the community up until the homily. In other words they joined for the Word of God. Then they left the community, and the Eucharist continued. While they were present the community prayed for them during the prayers of the Faithful. This was the community which they had asked to join. They also had to pray, fast, do works of mercy, and listen to God speak to them in scripture during the week. They were helped by a sponsor. It was only when the candidate reached a certain depth of faith that they went on a more severe time of preparation. The Community decided if the candidate was ready. If so they were received into the Church at Easter. This time of preparation still takes place for an adult who wants to become a Catholic today.

In our time it is usually babies who are baptised. But the preparation doesn't disappear. Now it is the Parents who hand on the Faith to the child. We are asked to insure that the parents hand on the faith to this child if they want the child baptised. If they haven't the faith themselves, and therefore don't go to Mass themselves they would be unable to hand on the Faith. One cannot give what they haven't got. Usually Parents wouldn't want a child baptised unless they celebrated the Eucharist each week. Why would they want for their child, what they don't want for themselves?. The celebration of the Eucharist each week was always the acid test of a follower of Christ. It is still the acid test. It is always necessary for parents who request to have their child baptised. It hasn't changed from the beginning. If parents are not

going to Mass the baptism should be postponed until parents decide to change their way of living. In other words there must be some proof that they are celebrating the Eucharist each week; living a Christian life, and concerned for their Parish.

This is the reason why some Parishes have Baptismal Courses before Baptism. In fact every Parish should have a Team for this work. This is the mind of the church as expressed by the Vatican Council fifty years ago. The Baptism of a child is a very big event for parents. Parents take on an awesome responsibility when they have their child baptised. They hand on the Faith by their own example as well as through their words. If they don't pray at home the child won't pray. If they don't celebrate the Eucharist the child will not celebrate the Eucharist. In other words if parents don't practice the child's baptism becomes meaningless, empty, and a pure joke. And all of us have colluded in making it a joke. This is a serious sin by any way of thinking, for we are telling God a lie.

If we are to baptise a child the Sponsors also should be practising Catholics. They are to represent the believing people. They are to help the parents bring the child up in the Faith. Obviously they cannot do this if they don't practice by celebrating the Eucharist themselves. When we talk about having a relationship with Christ and expressing that relationship by going to Mass we are talking about a minimum. As St James says: "Faith without good works is totally in vain". We are called also (1) to live the will of God, (2) to follow the teaching of Christ as found in Scripture. We are to be people of the Commandments, and the Beatitudes. We are "to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect". The standard set by Jesus is high; we cannot decide to lower that standard without acting as if we are God. We are not God.

Parents should read, and pray the Ceremony of Baptism before a child is born. God is our tremendous lover who awaits the birth of their child and parents make this love of God present for the child during life. This is their privilege and this is their responsibility. Therefore they should become convinced of their exalted calling, and stand before God in awe, thanking him for his goodness to them. Sometimes parents underestimate their great vocation. They are working with God and for God. They are involved in leading new people to God now, and also in leading them to heaven when they die. Is there any greater work? If you think that this is not the greatest of work, you should not have your child baptised for you have not allowed the excitement of the Holy Spirit to touch you. Parents are involved, as in tune with life at all the high points. They should rejoice and be glad.

Some parents don't believe in Christ, and therefore don't celebrate Mass on Sunday. Naturally these parents may decide not to have their child baptised. We should accept this fact in a society in which some do not have faith in Jesus. We should have equal respect for such parents. At a future date they may decide otherwise, but if not we hold them with equal regard and respect. Baptism is for those who believe and express their belief through the celebration of the Eucharist, and by the way they live. All should be honest and true to themselves.