

THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION



As per the earlier instruction, after the resurrection of Jesus, all his eleven apostles went to Mount Olive. The resurrected Jesus appeared, there, to them; they worshipped him. Approaching them Jesus said: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And, remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mt. 28:18-20). The Church is at present, continuing this mission entrusted to her by Jesus.

The Sacraments of Initiation

Baptism, Chrismation and Holy Eucharist are called the Sacraments of Initiation because they initiate a person into the mystery of the Messiah as well as into the Church community. A person starts his Christian life with these sacraments and so they are

called the Sacraments of Initiation. (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1212). The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Chrismation, and receive in the Eucharist, the food of eternal life. Thus, a person is born in the Church and grows in divine life. Hence, in the early centuries, these three sacraments were given together.

In the Eastern Churches, administering these three sacraments together is even today, being continued. The candidate is given Baptism and Chrismation, first of all, and then the holy Eucharist. The treatise 'Apostolic Tradition' of St. Hippolytus (170-235) reports that Baptism, Chrismation and Holy Eucharist were administered together.

BAPTISM **Participation in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus**

We participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus and are born anew by baptism. In baptism, we die and resurrect with Jesus and become anew. St. Paul writes to Romans: **“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the father, so we too might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4).**

The immersion in water, of the candidate for baptism, indicates his death together with Jesus; and the font is seen as a symbol of the tomb. The rising up from the water denotes the resurrection with Jesus.

ACTIVITY - 1

Divide the children into different groups and ask them to prepare a chart mentioning all the rites in the sacrament of Baptism. Discuss also about the symbolic meaning of these rites.



Sacrament of Baptism Forgives Sins

Baptism is a sacrament to forgive the sins. The original sin and all personal sins, if at all any, are forgiven through baptism. We pray in the creed, "We believe in the baptism that absolves sins." St. Paul teaches "that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed" (Rom. 6:6). **When the person receiving baptism answers: "I do" to the question: "Do you abandon sin and the ways to sin?," he proclaims that he has no more connection with sin.**

Born as Children of God

Jesus said to Nicodemus who came to see him by night: **"...no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit"** (Jn. 3:5). **The Holy Spirit transforms us as children of God through baptism; the resemblance to God lost through sin is regained. We are filled with divine life grace and made children of God and inheritors of heaven.** That is why St. Ephrem defines baptism as a ritual to seal the children for the kingdom of God. The fathers of the Church, hence, qualifies the font as the uterus of the Church that begets children for the Church.

Incorporated into the Fellowship of the Church

Baptism makes us organs of the mystical body of Christ. St. Paul says: **"For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."** (1 Cor. 12:13).



Once a person receives baptism, he becomes a member of the Church, and thereby belongs to Jesus and is configured to him. **Jesus imprints an indelible spiritual seal on him; this seal indicates that he belongs to Jesus.** Even sin cannot erase this mark. So, baptism is given only once and for all. A baptized person is bound to be submissive to others, serve others incorporating with the Church and obey the Church authorities (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1269, 1272).

Baptism and Faith



Baptism is a sacrament of faith. Jesus, during his resurrection, entrusted his disciples with a mission: **“Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned”** (Mk. 16:15-16). **Only those who believed Jesus completely were given baptism; salvation was guaranteed only to these believers.** When the jailer asked Paul and Silas what he had to do to be saved, the reply given by them clarifies this: **“Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household”** (Acts 16:31). St. Paul says: **“If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”** (Rom. 10:9).

In infant baptism, the Church considers the faith of the whole Church community. That is the reason why in infant baptism the god-father and god-mother reply to the questions asked on behalf of the infant; moreover the faith implanted through baptism is primary faith which should be nurtured. The faith of the baptized should develop properly after baptism; for this the Church and parents should extend help and co-operation. It is a duty of the Church community.

THE SACRAMENT OF CHRISMATION

Chrismation is the sacrament that grants strength and grace of the Holy Spirit to those born a new in the Holy Spirit and become children of God through Baptism, so that they can propagate the gospel of Christ and bear witness to Christ. Chrismation roots a person in the faith he received through Baptism. This sacrament connects a person totally with the Church; and he is enriched with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Catholic Church teaches that chrismation is a must for the completion of the grace received in baptism. This sacrament leads a person, reborn through baptism, to Christian maturity and enables him to bear witness to Jesus courageously and with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus, Anointed by the Spirit

'Messiah' in the Syriac language means the 'anointed.' Jesus is anointed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and anointed Jesus, during his baptism. Filled with the Holy Spirit and to fulfill the salvific scheme entrusted upon him, Jesus, with firm determination and awareness of his mission, reached the synagogue in Nazareth and started his public life. The Holy Spirit empowered him to execute the redemptive mission.

The Apostles Filled with the Spirit

Jesus, even before death, promised to his disciples the Holy Spirit (Jn.14:26). Jesus breathed



upon them and gave them the Holy Spirit (Jn. 20: 22-23). On the day of the Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles engrossed in prayer, in the dining hall in Sehion, in the form of tongues of fire and strengthened them for apostolic work.

The Ancient Christians Filled with the Spirit

The ancient Christians, who believed in Jesus and bore witness to him, were filled with the Spirit. The Holy Spirit strengthened them to sacrifice their lives for the sake of faith and become martyrs. St. Stephen is an example. We come across special prayers for conferring the Holy Spirit in the descriptions of baptism given in the Acts of the Apostles. Peter and Paul



ACTIVITY - 2

Write a paragraph mentioning the activities of the Holy Spirit based on the passages Lk. 3: 22; 4: 1; 4: 18; Acts. 2: 3-4; 4: 8; 5: 32; 6: 10; 7:55; 8: 29, 39; 10: 19; 11: 12; 13: 2,4.

prayed that the Samaritans, who received baptism, should receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17). We see in the Acts of the Apostles that when the apostles prayed laying hands on them the baptized received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-7).

Transforms us as the Temples of the Holy Spirit

A Christian, who through baptism participates in the death and resurrection of Jesus and is filled with the Holy Spirit through Chrismation, is the temple of the Holy Spirit. St. Paul says: "Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). We become children of God when we are led by the spirit of God dwelling within us.

Imparts Strength to the Christian life

Every Christian shares the Pentecostal experience through chrismation. We undertake the mission of being witnesses to Christ through thoughts, words, and deeds and even by

risking our own lives. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, we must be ready to proclaim this mission entrusted by the apostles until the end of the world. It should be executed through the Church. Our responsibility to the Church is but the responsibility to Jesus. Chrismation grants us the necessary blessings and grace to be an active member of the Church and live in the mission with Christ.

Let us receive the sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation and the Eucharist and become firm in faith so as to produce good fruits of faith and love.

**LET US
READ AND
MEDITATE THE
WORD OF GOD**

(Jn. 3 : 1 - 8)

A Verse to Remember

“Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit”

(Jn. 3:5)

Let us Pray

O! Jesus, who granted us the favour to become children of God through baptism, please bless us to fill ourselves with the Holy Spirit and bear witness to the gospel.

My Resolution

I will lead a life befitting a child of God and bear witness to love.

Teachings of the Fathers of the Church

O! How beautiful is the womb (the font) that begot a painless birth to the children of the kingdom. Grace this womb begets, the altar would sustain them. Their children drink no milk, but feed on perfect bread.

(St. Ephrem)

QUESTIONS

1. Name the sacraments of initiation. Why do we qualify them thus?
2. Why did the ancient Church administer the sacraments of initiation together?
3. Baptism is a sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Elucidate.
4. Chrismation leads a person born anew through baptism into Christian maturity. Explain.
5. Write short note on: Chrismation and the Christian life.