

### 3. What Are the Sacraments of Christian Initiation?

Sacraments are signs instituted by Christ to give grace, which is a share in the life of God. The Church celebrates the sacraments through visible rites that make real what they signify. For example, the rite for Baptism includes the use of water and the reciting of the baptismal formula. This rite both cleanses a person of sin and claims the person for God. It brings about what it signifies.

Do you know what it means to be initiated into a club? It is to be welcomed into the club through taking part in a ceremony, such as raising the right hand and reciting a pledge. Three of the Church's sacraments are called Sacraments of Initiation because they welcome a person into the full life of the Church. These sacraments are Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Through Baptism, a person begins a new life in Christ. Confirmation strengthens that new life. Through Eucharist, the person is nourished by Christ's Body and Blood in order to be transformed in Christ.

In the first centuries, when most new members of the Church were adults, all three sacraments were administered at the same time—first Baptism, then Confirmation, then Eucharist. In later centuries, however, when new members often were babies and as the Church grew, the three Sacraments of Initiation

were celebrated at different times so bishops could continue to complete Baptism in the celebration of Confirmation.

### 4. What Happens at Baptism?

In the Rite of Baptism, the minister either lowers the candidate's body into water or pours water on the candidate's head. While performing this action, the minister says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Ordinarily, the minister of Baptism is a bishop, priest, or deacon—someone who has received the Sacrament of Holy Orders. However, if necessary, anyone may administer Baptism. All that is needed is the clear intention to bring someone into the Church, the use of water, and to speak the words of Baptism: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Several wonderful things happen the moment a person is baptized. All the person's sins are forgiven. This includes both the Original Sin that person was born with and any personal sins he or she may have committed. (Babies are too young to sin.) Baptism is the first and chief sacrament for the forgiveness of sins.

A person also is given a whole new connection to the Blessed Trinity. God the Father adopts the person as his own child. God the Son welcomes the

The Church holds that those who suffer death for their faith without having received Baptism are baptized by their death. This Baptism of blood brings about the benefits of the sacrament without being a sacrament. The same is true for those who sincerely want to be baptized and die before receiving the sacrament. The Baptism of desire brings about the benefits of the sacrament.

### 5. What Happens at Confirmation?

Like Baptism, Confirmation imprints an indelible spiritual mark, or character, on the soul, so it can be received only once.

The Confirmation Rite is always administered either by a bishop or by a priest whom the bishop appoints. It includes two important actions and one important spoken formula. The first action is the anointing of the candidate's forehead with Sacred Chrism, which is special perfumed oil that the bishop has consecrated. The second action is the placement of the minister's hand on the candidate's head. As he does this, he says the words, "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit."

In this sacrament, the Holy Spirit perfects, deepens, and completes the graces given in Baptism. The candidate receives the Holy Spirit in order to be bonded more firmly with Christ and his

person into his worldwide family, the Church. God the Holy Spirit dwells within the person, turning him or her into a living, breathing temple of God. Here are some ways to think of these new connections to the Trinity. Baptism makes someone a child of God much as an orphan adopted by the Smith family becomes their own special child and receives the Smith name. Baptism makes someone a part of the Church much as being born on U.S. soil automatically makes someone a U.S. citizen. Baptism makes someone a temple of the Holy Spirit much as an ordinary room becomes a chapel after the Blessed Sacrament is placed inside it. (The Blessed Sacrament is bread that has become Christ's Body at a Eucharistic Celebration.)

Baptism changes who you are!

Once you become a child of God, you are a child of God forever and nothing can change that. Because Baptism imprints an indelible spiritual mark, or character, on your soul, this sacrament can be received only once. *Indelible* means that this mark cannot be changed or erased.

The Church teaches that Baptism is necessary for salvation. That's why the Church urges parents to seek Baptism shortly after a child's birth. But knowing that God wants all to be saved gives hope that there is a way to salvation for children who die without Baptism.