

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK

BAPTISM - SPIRIT FILLED REBIRTH!

One of our great joys as priests is to baptize babies at the font here in the church. During the baptismal ceremony, the priest or deacon who performs the rite usually gives a brief homily. There is a story I like to tell in my remarks which concerns a young father attending the baptism of his first child. He was really excited but also just a little bit nervous.

The priest approached him and said, "Baptism is a serious step. Are you sure you're prepared for it?" Dad replied, "Of course father! My wife called the caterer and we're having a wonderful spread back at the house." The priest shook his head and said, "No - I don't mean that! I mean are you prepared spiritually?" "Sure," the proud pop replied, "We've got a case of whiskey and a keg of beer too!"

Well, when you think about it, baptism is a serious step in our faith life. In fact, it is the "first step" because baptism is our initiation into the church. I mention the sacrament of baptism today because on this the last Sunday of the Christmas season, the church celebrates the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Even Christ Himself was baptized by his cousin Saint John.

Of course, as we know, the Lord had absolutely no need of baptism because He had no sin. A saint the name of Maximus once said, "Jesus was baptized not to be made holy by the waters but rather to make the waters holy for all of us." By His baptism in the Jordan, Jesus consecrated and blessed the waters of baptism and He also gave us an example to follow after Him. And certainly, we did follow His example - that is by we are here in St. Charles Church today!

I suppose that not many of us think about the day of our baptism, but it really was one of the most important days of our life. On that day, we were re-born spiritually at the font. In the sacrament of baptism, the priest (or deacon) does something very simple. He takes some blessed water and pours it over the head of the child three times saying, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Something so profoundly simple and yet very rich in its effects.

What happens at baptism? Well, first of all, original sin, the sin of our first parents is cleansed from our souls forever. Secondly, grace which is God's life within us, is infused into our soul for the very first time. Baptism, therefore, truly makes us children of God. The church also teaches us that this sacrament confers on the souls what is called a "character." A character is like an indelible spiritual mark which configures a person to Christ in a special way. This is why baptism is never repeated.

Finally, in baptism a man or woman receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit and they begin their first great step in their journey of faith in the church. Later on, a child will receive penance, first holy communion and then confirmation. But baptism starts everything off!

We should be very grateful to our parents who took care that we were baptized within a reasonable period of time. A priest that I know told me that he was only two weeks old when he received the sacrament. I suppose things have changed in our times - maybe not for the better! Today many couples wait months and sometimes a year or so before the baby is baptized. Well, the sacrament should not be unduly delayed! On this Feast of the Lord's Baptism, let us give thanks for our own baptism, for it is by God's gift through water and the Holy Spirit that we are born to everlasting life!

*Sincerely in Christ,
Fr. Jerome*