

THE SACRAMENT OF



baptism

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— The Sacrament of Baptism
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The Sacrament of
BAPTISM
Life Giving Waters

by Rev. Bernard I. Mullahy, C.S.C.



AVE MARIA PRESS
Notre Dame, Indiana

NIHIL OBSTAT—John L. Reedy, C.S.C.
Censor Deputatus

IMPRIMATUR—✠ Most Rev. Leo A. Pursley, D.D.
Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend

May, 1961

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Second Printing, March, 1962

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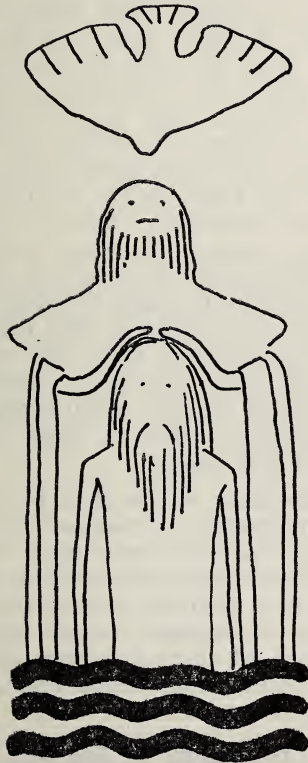
No matter how weak or lukewarm a Catholic's faith might become, he knows that his first visit to a church was of vast importance in his life, that in some way it changed him and set him apart from all who have never been baptized. He might not live up to the commitments Baptism has laid upon him, but he goes through life never forgetting that he has been baptized. And yet, it was outwardly a brief, simple ceremony. Someone poured water over his head and recited the formula "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." But the Church tells us that this ceremony has consequences for the rest of our life here and for all eternity. By it we share God's life — through grace — here on earth and can be united to Him in heaven.

The First Baptism

In the beginning of his Gospel, St. Mark tells us how Christ went down into the river Jordan with St. John the Baptist and let its water flow over His sacred body. From that moment all the waters of creation had a new dignity and a new mysterious power to penetrate into the inner life of God and to reach across all the ages of eternity. This power is at work when the waters of Baptism flow over the head of the person being baptized.

The full measure of the Church's appreciation of this new dignity which Christ infused into the waters of creation can be seen most clearly during the Easter Vigil. Forgetting her ordinary calm and detached demeanor that night, the Church becomes positively lyrical in her praise of the baptismal waters. She sings of their power and glory; she bends over them with awe and reverence, and breathes upon them. She caresses them with the consecrated hand of the priest and anoints them with the oil of catechumens and with chrism. Taking the paschal candle, the symbol of Christ Himself, she plunges it into the water three times, praying that the power of the Holy Spirit will penetrate the innermost depths of the water. And why?

Because she knows that this water is destined to be, in Baptism, the instrument which God uses to transform man beyond



all human comprehension. It is the means used to transform man into a "partaker of the divine nature."

A Puzzling Mystery

There is a mystery here which stops us and makes us think. How is it that a few drops of water can open for us the riches of God's inner life, can make the difference between obtaining and losing forever the ecstasy of heaven? We should think about this; for the waters of Baptism are a sign, and signs are language for our minds.

Like all sacraments, Baptism is both a sign and a cause. It is a sign which produces what it signifies. And in order to understand what it causes to happen within us we have to understand what it signifies. But this is no simple task. For centuries, theologians have labored to understand and to explain the two essential aspects of the sacraments—that is, that they are both signs and causes.

We sometimes act as if it is not very important whether or not we understand much about the sacraments since they will produce their effects automatically anyway. This implicit attitude toward the sacraments has its dangers. It can lessen our appreciation of them and even lead to a mere formalism almost approaching superstition in our use of them.

The Liturgy of Baptism

If we are to understand the sacrament of Baptism adequately we have to go beyond the mere pouring of water and the recitation of the formula and study all of

the ceremonies of the baptismal rite. We have to look at it in the light of the liturgy of the Easter Vigil, which was for centuries the feast of Baptism, the only regular time of the year when adults received this sacrament. We have to look at it in the light of the whole Lenten liturgy, which was designed originally to prepare catechumens for Baptism. All these things constitute, in a sense, the total "sign" of Baptism.

Today we are in a better position than Christians have been for centuries to understand this "sign." Here in the United States we are allowed to have almost the whole ceremony of Baptism in English and so can follow it with comparative ease. The Easter Vigil as it was restored some years ago by Pope Pius XII should help us understand better the connection between this feast and the sacrament of Baptism. And finally, the liturgical movement is each day opening up for us more and more the meaning of Lent and the riches of the sacramental life of the Church.

If it is important for us to draw fully upon these riches for a better understanding of all the sacraments, this is especially true of Baptism. Most of us received this sacrament as infants when we were unable to understand what was happening to us. But at that time, through our sponsors, we made solemn vows. And we had better explore the implications of those vows, for one day we are going to have to answer

to God for the way we kept them or disregarded them.

The essential act of Baptism is completed with the pouring of the water and recitation of the formula: "I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." But if we fail to look beyond this, Baptism will appear to us only as a washing which cleanses us of the stain of original sin. That Baptism does this, there can be no doubt. In blessing the baptismal water on Holy Saturday night the Church prays: "Do thou bless with thy mouth this clean water, that, besides the natural power it possesses for cleansing the body, it may also prove effective in purifying the soul." But we run a double risk in stopping here.

First, we make Baptism largely a negative thing; and secondly, we make it purely individualistic, the washing of this particular soul. Actually, the waters of Baptism have a much deeper significance than this. They refer among other things to three major episodes in the history of the universe and of God's chosen people.

Three Historical Events

The first prophecy sung at the Easter Vigil service before the blessing of the baptismal font is the story of the creation of the universe. "God, at the beginning of time, created heaven and earth. Earth was still an empty waste, and darkness hung

over the deep; but already, over its waters brooded the Spirit of God. . . . And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good" (Gen. 1: 1, 2, 31). From this description of creation we can almost picture the Spirit of God moving over the waters "like a bird hovering over the nest which contains her young," giving fecundity to the waters and bringing out of them an ordered universe and life itself.

Christ Himself almost surely had this scene in mind when He explained to Nicodemus the meaning of Baptism in the rather startling image of a divine birth issuing from an intimate and fruitful marriage between the Holy Spirit and water. "Unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

And the Church, in blessing the baptismal water at the Easter Vigil, is thinking of this when she prays: "May the power of the Holy Spirit descend into the innermost being of this water, and render the whole substance of this water fruitful for bestowing spiritual rebirth."

The second episode from the Old Testament which the waters of Baptism are supposed to bring to mind for us is the story of Noah and the Flood. Through the waters of the Deluge, God destroyed the wicked and created a new people through Noah and those who were with him on the Ark. The Church recalls this for us in the



blessing of the baptismal water when she sings: "O God, Who . . . by the outpouring of the Deluge didst signify the sacrament of rebirth, that one and the same element used in mystery might be the end of vice and the origin of virtue. . . ."

And finally, the waters of Baptism are intended to remind us of the passing of God's chosen people unharmed through the Red Sea which then came together to destroy the armies of Pharaoh which were

pursuing them. Here again the power of water was used to destroy evil and to bring about a new life for the children of God. This incident is told in the second prophecy read in the Easter Vigil service.

There are two significant points common to these three narratives that the Church wishes us to remember on Easter Saturday night. First, the negative aspect in them — the destruction of chaos and evil — is only a prelude to a new creation, a new life in all its freshness, a new humanity. Secondly, these are not stories of a mere individual, but of the dawn of a whole new creation, a new race, a new people, a new life for the children of God. Only by meditating on these two points can we get an insight into the full meaning of Baptism.

Suddenly, the Climax

During Holy Week, and especially at the Easter Vigil, we reach the culminating point of the whole theme of the Lenten liturgy. Through it we are given a share in Christ's battle against sin and the powers of darkness; we die with Him to sin and death in order to rise with Him to a new life. To be baptized means exactly the same thing. We are, as St. Paul expressed it, "baptized in His death. For we are buried together with Him by Baptism unto death: that, as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we

also may walk in newness of life" (Rom. 7:3-4). The baptismal font, which is consecrated at the Easter Vigil, is both a tomb and a maternal womb.

In Baptism the soul comes into direct and immediate contact for the first time with the redemptive act of Christ. This identifies the soul so intimately and so completely with Christ in His Redemption that St. Thomas can make this astounding statement: "To each baptized person the Passion of Christ is imparted *as if he himself had suffered and died on the Cross.*"

Baptism means an identification with Christ in His mortal battle with Satan and the powers of hell, the battle about which the Church sings in the Easter Mass: "Death and Life in a strange conflict strove." By keeping in mind this idea of Christ and the baptized person in conflict with the devil in Baptism, we can understand a number of things which take place in the baptismal ceremony.

In the Roman army it was customary to put a tattoo mark upon the body of the recruits, a mark symbolizing their allegiance to the general in whose army they were enlisted. So in Baptism, not once but many times, the sign of the cross is made on or over the one being baptized to show his allegiance to Christ. Also, in the ceremony of Baptism there is the anointing with oil. The symbolism here comes from the ancient practice of athletes rubbing

their bodies with oil in preparation for their matches.

Finally, this idea of a struggle with the devil is most clearly brought out through the exorcisms in the baptismal ceremony. There are many more exorcisms in the Baptism of adults than in those of infants; yet even infants are under the sway of original sin, and wherever there is sin the powers of Satan are at work.

Our War with Satan

But what we should note in all this is that every Baptism, whether it be of adults or of infants, is a participation in the dramatic struggle between Christ and Satan which was, *and is*, the redemption of the world. Only by seeing Baptism in this perspective can we make much sense out of the baptismal ceremony, which, right up until the last moment before the pouring of the water, when the candidate is asked to solemnly renounce Satan, seems to be a continual struggle with the powers of hell.

The victory which emerges from this struggle is an astounding newness of life which is like a new creation. In blessing the baptismal waters on Holy Saturday night the Church prays that "whatsoever is sanctified in the immaculate womb of this font may be born again as a new creature, and come forth as an offspring of heaven."

What Is This New Life?

What is this new life, this new creation which comes forth from the immaculate womb of the baptismal font? This is indeed a great mystery, but it need not leave us mystified as it did Nicodemus when Christ first spoke to him of the necessity of being born again through water and the Holy Spirit.

This new birth is something infinitely greater than the universe which sprang from the waters over which the Spirit of God hovered in the first creation. It is something infinitely greater than the natural birth of human life, when a child issues from the womb of its mother and becomes forever a part of the history of the human race. It is something infinitely greater than every other possible birth except one: the eternal birth of the Word of God from the bosom of the Father in the inner depths of the life of the Trinity. The reason is simply that it is a share in this eternal birth of the Word of God.

For to be baptized is to be made a "partaker of the divine nature," as St. Peter tells us simply and unequivocally. Here we have a mystery, but it is a reality, not just a figure of speech.

Baptism is not, as much non-Catholic theology tends to view it, merely a ritual which contains a promise of future holiness

when salvation has been achieved. Baptism makes a person holy right here and now — and with God's own holiness. It makes him a saint, one who would go directly to take his rightful place with the saints in heaven if he were to die immediately after Baptism. And if later on he becomes something less than a saint, it is only because he deliberately fails to live out fully the grace of Baptism.

Baptism is like the story Greek mythology tells of Pygmalion, who fell in love with the statue of a woman he had sculptured and whose love could find no fulfillment until she was transformed into a human being who could know him with a human mind and love him with a human heart. God fell in love with us, the work of His hands. And this love could have its fulfillment only by our being transformed in Baptism, given a share in divine life, given a divine light for our minds to know Him as He knows Himself and a divine love for our hearts to love as He loves all things.

The waters of Baptism have a power far greater than the power Christ gave to the pool of Siloe which cured the poor man who had been born blind. "He said to him: 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloe.' . . . He went therefore and washed, and he came away seeing" (John 9:7). We come away from the baptismal font seeing as only God can see. In the phrase of St. Paul, we come away walking "as children of light."

How Faith Enters

The light of faith is the first thing we request at the beginning of the baptismal ceremony and the thing to which we are repeatedly asked to pledge ourselves at that solemn moment just before the pouring of the waters. This is not simply committing ourselves in advance to accept a body of abstract truths revealed by God and given to us by the Church. It is a share in the light of God's own mind and in His eternal wisdom. It gives our intellects a power that infinitely exceeds the natural capacity of every created intellect, angelic as well as human. It makes us "intellectuals" in the fullest sense of the term, for it gives our minds a share in the intelligence of God Himself.

It gives our minds the capacity not only to know God in some way as He knows Himself, but also to see all things as He sees them. The baptized Christian should see everything in the light of faith; for him, seeing is always believing. And this light is destined to grow all the days of our life until it breaks forth into the brilliance of the Beatific Vision in heaven, when we finally become fully wise with the wisdom of God Himself. This is why a few grains of salt, the symbol of wisdom, are placed upon the tongue in Baptism, and why, in the Baptism of adults, the priest makes the sign of the cross on the eyes of the candi-

date, saying: "I sign you upon the eyes that you may see the brightness of God."

Here too we have the meaning of the lighted candle presented at the end of the baptismal ceremony. We now have the great grace, in the Easter Vigil, of lighting our candle from the one pure Light Who is Christ, symbolized by the paschal candle, and of renewing publicly our baptismal vows while it burns brightly in our hand. Thus, we are now in a better position than ever before to understand the true meaning of the lighted candle in Baptism and the faith it symbolizes.



With Faith Comes Love

As a divine light is given our minds through faith, so a divine love is given our hearts through the infusion of charity, which is a share in the love that is proper to God and in the way He loves all things. After Baptism the Christian is no longer free to love anyone or anything with a purely natural love; he can no longer have

in his heart any affection, or lack of affection, which God cannot share. This is the meaning of the first command given to the candidate at the very beginning of the baptismal ceremony: "Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind; and love your neighbor as you love yourself."

This fire of charity is supposed to go on increasing in our hearts all the days of our life until it breaks forth into that flaming ecstasy which is the Beatific Vision.

We are baptized, not simply in the name of God, but in the name of each of the three Persons of the Blessed Trinity. This is because Baptism gives us a participation in the three-shared life of God and establishes extraordinary relations between us and the three Persons. In blessing the baptismal water at the Easter Vigil the Church prays: "Send forth the spirit of adoption to beget new life in them that are born unto Thee in this font of Baptism."

This adoption is something far more profound than natural adoption, which is, after all, simply a legal fiction. An adopted child here on earth undergoes no interior change whatsoever. The blood which runs through his veins remains different from that of his adopting parents. The supernatural adoption of Baptism, on the other hand, changes our interior and gives us a

share in the divine life of the Father. As St. John assures us, we are not merely *called* His sons, as in natural adoption; we actually *are* His sons. And St. Paul tells us that this makes us heirs to all the infinite riches and happiness of God's life, which will be ours when we finally come of age supernaturally in heaven.

One with Christ

Becoming sons of the Father makes us enter into the life of His only begotten Son. The new birth of Baptism is, as we have said, a share in the eternal birth of the Word in the bosom of the Father. Baptism makes us one with Christ by incorporating us into His Mystical Body. The word *Christ* means the *Anointed One*: in Baptism we are *christened* by being anointed with chrism. The sign of the cross put upon our foreheads is His stamp and seal upon us. Baptism not only makes us belong to Christ; in some sense it identifies us with Him. The phrase "another Christ," which is now usually reserved for priests, was originally used in reference to all Christians.

And indeed the special sacramental character which Baptism imprints on the soul gives all Christians a share in the priesthood of Christ. The anointing with holy chrism is similar to the anointing that has traditionally gone into the making of priests and kings. Through Baptism the Christian participates in the royal and priestly dig-

nity of Christ; and although this priestliness is something quite different from the priesthood of Holy Orders, yet it is a real priesthood and it calls both for a life of sacrifice and for active participation in the liturgy, the worship of the Church.

The call for active and intelligent participation in the worship of the Church becomes all the more insistent when we realize that Baptism also makes the Christian a place of worship, a consecrated temple, a tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. In the baptismal rite the priest prays that the candidate "may become a temple of the living God and that the Holy Spirit may dwell in him." God comes to inhabit the soul, to fill it with His awesome yet intimate presence. This presence is not a fiction; it is a reality. God is present in the soul in the state of grace in a way in which He is not present anywhere else in the universe.

The mother who receives her child back from the baptismal font is holding in her arms a holy and consecrated tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. This infant enfolds within himself the very life of the Blessed Trinity, just as truly and surely (though in quite a different way) as the mother had enfolded him in her womb. Since her child is a real temple, a real chapel of God, there is no reason why she cannot pray to the God Who resides within him as she bathes, feeds and cares for him.

It is said that the father of Origen used to uncover the breast of his newly baptized

son and kneel down before him to adore the presence of the Blessed Trinity. Baptism has made this child so unspeakably precious that St. Thomas Aquinas, who was not given to exaggeration, tells us it is worth more than all other created things in the natural order put together.

We Are One of Many

The new life which makes the baptized person so precious is not an individualistic life; it is a social life. What emerges from the waters of creation, the waters of the Deluge and the waters of the Red Sea is not an individual in isolation but a whole new creation, a new people, a new race, a new humanity.

The divine life given in Baptism is essentially a social life; for the Blessed Trinity, in whose name Baptism takes place, is a Society of three Persons all sharing in the most profound social life possible. Baptism means that this social life of the Trinity is communicated to the Christian. It means an initiation into a supernatural society, into an organism known as the Mystical Body of Christ. It does not simply unite the individual soul with God and with Christ; it also unites it intimately with all the other members of Christ's Mystical Body. St. Paul tells us this explicitly: "We were all baptized into one Body . . . you are the Body of Christ and severally His members" [I Cor. 2:16].

The early Christians who were baptized

on Holy Saturday night had this concept brought home to them vividly. On emerging from the baptismal font they marched in a group, dressed in white robes, into the church where, one at last with their fellow Christians, they offered together for the first time the social Sacrifice of the Mass and were united together in the one Eucharistic Bread.

And now the new rite for the Easter Vigil makes it possible for us to sense, as we never could before, the social mystery in Baptism. When all have lighted their candles from the one candle representing Christ, we see our individual candle as a part of the sea of fire filling and illuminating the church. Together we recite our baptismal vows in plural form: "*We* do believe. . . . *We* do renounce him."

The person who has been baptized can never again be alone, can never be an isolationist. He cannot act alone, pray alone or suffer alone. When he prays, it is a social experience: he prays in the name of all Christians. His sufferings and good works have a social value, a redeeming value for the whole Mystical Body. So intimate are the social relations between baptized persons that St. Thomas can tell us: "He that lives in charity shares in every good that is produced in the whole world."

How Satan Operates

If this is so, then perhaps we had better take a second — and closer — look at the

meaning of the solemn promises we made in Baptism.

What are the works and pomps of Satan which we renounced then? When we think of them at all, we conceive them in terms of the salvation and sanctification of our individual soul. We think of the sins, seductions and allurements of the world which are set to trap us; we think of the secret assaults of the devil on our chastity or our honesty. What we do not realize is that Satan knows better than we that the divine life both in heaven and on earth is essentially a social life, and his cleverest and most insidious devices are in the area of social relations.

When we took our baptismal vows, then, we said something about racial prejudice, about the social needs of the Mystical Body, about domestic, economic, political and international problems. And we shall be judged by all that was implicit in these vows.

It will be difficult for us to realize that Baptism is a social experience if we do not try to give it a much more communal setting than it now usually has. Friends and relatives gather in large numbers for funerals and marriages, but Baptism is often performed without anything that suggests a real community. There are, of course, many reasons why this should be so; yet Baptism is a far greater occasion and one with far deeper social implications.

Could not parents in their birth announcements invite relatives and friends to be present at the baptismal ceremony? The new Easter Vigil rite suggests that pastors try to arrange for Baptisms during the Vigil service. There could not possibly be a better occasion to provide this sacrament with the social setting it calls for and at the same time to give all the members of the parish a better understanding of its meaning. Perhaps at other times during the year arrangements could be made for Baptism in the presence of the parish community.

Why Not Celebrate Baptism?

Parents should often do some serious thinking about their attitude toward Baptism and their baptized children. Is it fitting that only natural birthdays should be celebrated and the anniversaries of Baptism be forgotten? And what about those cleverly designed announcements sent to relatives and friends which give all the details of natural birth, the date, the number of pounds and ounces — while ignoring completely the greater events of rebirth in Christ?

Do we not believe that this child's true grandeur comes from this rebirth which has given him a share in God's inner life? If we do, we ought to let our faith, our conviction and our supernatural sense of values be known to all our friends, including non-Catholics. Many different types of an-

nouncement cards which reflect this supernatural sense of values and which are tasteful and well designed pieces of Christian art are now available.

Since Baptism is a real birth, the role of the sponsors should never be looked upon as a mere formality. They are what their names, *godfather* and *godmother*, say they are: spiritual parents who have co-operated in a birth which is a share in the life of God. To make this clear the Church forbids marriage between them and their godchildren.

Parents should take seriously the task of selecting godparents for their children; they should choose only those who are highly qualified to fulfill their spiritual duties, those who will pray for their godchildren constantly and make sure their religious education is provided for. The sponsors themselves should take seriously the invitation to become godparents. They should see it as a great spiritual experience, a source of many special graces and an opportunity to discover or rediscover the true meaning of their own Baptism by a preparation of prayer and reading.

Practical Formalities

In searching for ways to keep alive in their children and in themselves the consciousness of Baptism's meaning, many parents find that one of the best means is to prepare themselves the simple white robe

and the candle (either plain or appropriately decorated) which will be given to the child at the end of the baptismal ceremony. They can then bring these symbolic gifts home and keep them in the family as souvenirs of the greatest event in the life of the child, the greatest event that could ever happen in human life.

Each year as the anniversary of Baptism is celebrated, contact with this great event can be renewed by bringing out these gifts and lighting the candle once again. Perhaps the preparation of the baptismal robe will remind parents that the most fitting color in which to dress children for the ceremony of Baptism is pure white, the symbol of the freshness, the utter newness and the unspeakable purity of the divine life given to the soul in this sacrament. [This dress, incidentally, should be fitted loosely around the neck, so that the priest will not have difficulty in anointing the body of the child.]

This child who is dressed in her white baptismal robe today will on another day later on walk down the aisle of the church, clothed in a white dress and veil with all the unspoiled innocence and purity of childhood, to participate for the first time in the sacrificial banquet of the Mass. On another day, still later, she may walk down the aisle again, dressed in a white gown and veil, this time a radiant bride, to receive and to give to another the sacrament of Matri-

mony. Or perhaps it will be the white veil of a novice as, radiant with an even greater love, in all the freshness of her young womanhood, she celebrates her espousals with Christ Himself. And this other child: one day he may be seen dressed in a white alb and a white chasuble ascending the altar to offer for the first time the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

On all these occasions, when there is the beginning of a great newness of life, we usually fail to reflect that, in a sense, something of the white cloth of the baptismal robe has gone into the making of all these other white garments. None of these events could take place if Baptism had not gone before; they are its development and fulfillment. For the Christian there can be no newness of life that does not flow from that radical newness of life which first came to him on the day of Baptism.

We should not overlook the fact that not only the alb and the chasuble but also the white veils of the first communicant, the bride and the novice are, in a sense, priestly vestments. To participate in the sacrificial banquet of the Mass and thus become at once the "offerer" and "offered" along with Christ, to be the actual minister of a sacrament as are the bride and groom in matrimony — these are priestly functions — an exercise of the priestly character given in Baptism.

And the novice entering the religious

state to give herself completely to Christ is bringing to fulfillment her priestly character in a way no one else can. Her religious vows will not be anything radically new; they will merely bring to completion her baptismal vows.

Never Delay Baptism!

Parents whose faith in the meaning of Baptism is alive and active should prevent the christening of their children from being unduly postponed — not merely because something might happen to them during the delay, but also because they will want to reduce to an absolute minimum the number of hours and minutes their children will be in existence deprived of the life of God, divine sonship, membership in the Mystical Body, the inhabitation of the Blessed Trinity.

If Baptism means all that the Church teaches us it does, it is worth every possible effort to deepen our understanding of it and to grow constantly in the consciousness of its many practical implications. There are a number of ways in which this can be done.

For one thing, we can celebrate the anniversary of our Baptism every year. The best way of doing this is by going to Mass, and even having a Mass offered on that day to thank God for all the unspeakable graces of Baptism and to beg for all the daily help we need to bring them to fulfillment, to

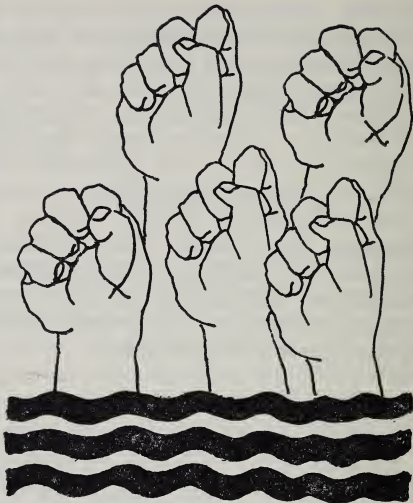
grow daily in the divine life so that we shall become the saints God wants us to be. So few Christians even know the exact day of their christening! On this day and at other times during the year, our prayers should include a remembrance of the priest who baptized us and of our godparents who assumed the serious responsibility of watching over our spiritual welfare. Besides the anniversary day itself, Holy Saturday, Easter and Low Sunday are days which in the mind and the liturgy of the Church have special reference to Baptism, and this reference should not be missed.

Holy Water—A Reminder

Holy Water should be a reminder of Baptism, an echo of it. Whenever we bless ourselves with it, we should remind ourselves of our transformation in Christ. And since the Christian home is supposed to be a kind of echo of the parish church, holy water should be kept at home also and used frequently, especially upon rising in the morning and before retiring at night.

Abandonment to Christ

A story is told of a king whose conversion to Christianity made him so enthusiastic about his new Faith that he decided to make Christians of all his soldiers by marching them down to a river for Baptism. The soldiers, it seems, were willing enough to be baptized, provided their way of life



would not be fundamentally disturbed by it. While they were being immersed in the river they held their fighting fists above its waters so that they would not have to give up their battles and their bloodshed.

This illustrates what a good many Christians do who refuse to allow themselves to be immersed completely in Baptism by living out all its practical implications, who try to hold above the baptismal waters their business deals, their pursuit of pleasure, wealth and status, their worldly scale of values, their apathy toward international problems, the naturalistic principles by which they live, their racial prejudices and

their indifference toward hunger, poverty and suffering in the world.

Even though Baptism is not ordinarily administered by immersion any more, but by a pouring of water on the head, it must always mean a total immersion of our whole being and our whole life in Christ. And the fact that we have been baptized by the pouring of water on our head should remind us that our intellect, above all, must be truly Christian. For we shall be fully transformed in Christ only when the baptismal waters have finally penetrated into the inner core of our thinking.

There are eight pamphlets in this series on the sacraments. Each pamphlet has 32 pages plus a two-color cover. Priced at 15 cents each.

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