

THE RESPONSIBILITIES PUBLICLY TAKEN ON BEFORE GOD
BY THOSE WHO PRESENT CHILDREN FOR BAPTISM

Baptism is a beautiful ceremony that initiates a child into the Christian community. However, it is also a moment of great solemnity in which those freely presenting the child for baptism make firm commitments about the child's upbringing.

Near the start of the ceremony, the priest addresses the parents and godparents:

Priest: You have asked to have your children baptised.
In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of
training them in the practice of the faith.
It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God's
commandments as Christ taught us,
by loving God and our neighbour.

Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?

Parents: **We do.**

Priest: Are you ready to help these parents in their duty as Christian mothers and fathers?

Godparents: **We are.**

And before the actual Baptism, the priest invites the parents and godparents to renew their own baptismal promises:

Priest: Dear parents and godparents: You have come here to present these children for baptism. By water and the Holy Spirit they are to receive the gift of new life from God, who is love.

On your part, you must make it your constant care
to bring them up in the practice of the faith.
See that the divine life which God gives them
is kept safe from the poison of sin,
to grow always stronger in their hearts.

If your faith makes you ready to accept this responsibility,
renew now the vows of your own baptism.

Reject sin; profess your faith in Christ Jesus.

This is the faith of the Church.

This is the faith in which these children are about to be baptised.

It is good for those taking on these responsibilities before God to reflect on them in more depth prior to the ceremony.

“You have asked to have your children baptised. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training them in the practice of the faith.”

The Catholic Church presents four ‘pillars’ in the practice of the Catholic Faith in which the children are being baptised:

1. Profession of Faith; 2. Sacraments; 3. Christian way of life; 4. Prayer.

1. PROFESSION OF FAITH

- In the first place comes *belief* in all that God has taught us.
- What we believe in our minds isn’t everything, yet for a follower of Jesus Christ it is an essential foundation stone. The Bible presents faith as the beginning of salvation.
- Faith is not simply ‘having a set of religious opinions’. It means accepting all that God has taught us *out of trust in his truthfulness*.
- For us as Christians, this means believing all that Christ has taught, because he is God himself (God the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit) become man.
- And for us as Catholics, this means believing all that the Catholic Church teaches to be revealed by God, because we believe that the Catholic Church is the Church that was founded by Jesus himself upon St Peter (the first Pope) and the other Apostles (the first Bishops), and guided by the Holy Spirit in right teaching until the end of time as Christ promised.
- Obviously, not every parent of a child baptised as a Catholic will necessarily be someone who believes all the Catholic Faith themselves. The Church understands that they will especially pass on those aspects of Catholic faith and practice that do coincide with their own beliefs.
- Yet having a child baptised as a Catholic is a commitment to raise the child as a believer in the Catholic Faith. This is one reason why there must be at least one Catholic godparent.
- It can happen that Catholic parents or godparents might themselves be ambivalent about some aspects of the Catholic Faith which they are committing themselves to pass on. Baptism of a child may be an opportunity to reflect more deeply on one’s own faith commitment

2. THE SACRAMENTS

Grace

- A common misunderstanding of Christian life is that it simply means 'doing the right thing', 'living a good life', by our own resources.
- The way taught by Christ, the Bible and the Church is different, (though of course it includes right living). The Christian life is a *sharing in God's own life*. This sharing is initiated by Christ, the one who was both God and man. It is the seed of life in heaven. Planted in our hearts on this earth, this seed is called *grace*. To enter heaven, we need grace in our hearts when we die.
- Grace is what empowers us to freely live in accordance with God's law. The Bible rejects as proud 'self-sufficiency' the attempt to live good lives while rejecting the help of God's grace.
- The Seven Sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, Matrimony) are primary *channels of grace*, instituted by Christ.
- In Christ's plan, the normal way that grace is first received is when we are united to him, and with his saving Death and Resurrection, through the Sacrament of Baptism (though God has his own ways of giving grace to those who never get the chance for Baptism).
- The other Sacraments nourish this grace in various ways, or in the case of Reconciliation (Confession), restore it if it has been lost by deliberate serious sin.
- A child who is baptised should be brought to the other Sacraments in due course – Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation.
- Eucharist and Reconciliation in particular should be a regular part of the practice of the Catholic Faith in which the children are raised.

The Eucharist

- Participation in the Eucharist, and in particular, Sunday Mass, is the heart of Catholic life. In the first place, this is the worship we all owe to God as our Creator, so at the most basic level, it is a serious duty a baptised Catholic child should be raised to fulfil.

- Jesus taught the necessity of the spiritual nourishment of Holy Communion especially in John's Gospel: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven ... Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed... This is the bread that came down from heaven... the one who eats this bread will live for ever." (Jn 6:51, 53-55, 58)
- The weekly regularity of communal worship that God desires for us isn't at our own discretion, but is taught to us in the Scriptures and the law of the Church. Thus the third of God's 'Ten Commandments' is 'Remember to keep holy the sabbath day'. For Christians, the Holy Day is Sunday, the Lord's Day, the day of Christ's resurrection. The Church further specifies, by the authority given her by Christ, that Catholics must keep the Lord's Day holy primarily by participating in the Mass every Sunday (or Saturday evening), unless excused by a grave reason.
- Hopefully, though, Sunday Mass will come to be seen as so much more than 'obligation'. God doesn't make his laws for his own benefit, but for ours, and he is never outdone in generosity. Our faithful sharing in the Mass each week is the supreme moment in which God pours out hidden blessings upon us, both in this life and for eternity.

Reconciliation

- Jesus told his Apostles, the first priests, 'Those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven'. (Jn 20:23) This was the beginning of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Catholics should confess at least annually, and hopefully more often.
- Reconciliation is an important channel of healing and strengthening even in the case of our smaller sins, even though these can also be forgiven in other ways. Most importantly however, in God's plan, repentant confession of our serious sins is the normal way we are set back on the path to heaven if we have turned from God and rejected his grace by serious violation of any of his laws.

3. THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE

“It will be your duty to bring them up to keep God’s commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbour.”

- Beyond *faith* itself, a Christian is obviously called to live out their faith as best they can by the path of *love* that Jesus taught us.
- Christian love is more than just a ‘feeling’: The Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments spell out for us some of what real love means, according to the teaching of Christ. Catholic belief is that the teaching of the Church is also guided by God so as to give the right interpretation of the law of right and wrong.
- None of us live these laws of love perfectly! But parents and godparents will strive, by word and example, to teach the child who has been baptised this path of love and faithfulness to all God’s law.

4. PRAYER

- The Sacraments and public worship of the Church are only one of the ways we open ourselves to the grace God wishes to give us. Personal prayer is also very important.
- Prayer can involve asking God to help us in our needs. But it is so much more. It is about allowing God to nourish our relationship of faith and love with him.
- So, a baptised child will also be raised to have a personal relationship with God in prayer – individual and family. This is how we open ourselves to true friendship with God.
- Daily prayer should become part of the upbringing of a baptised child.