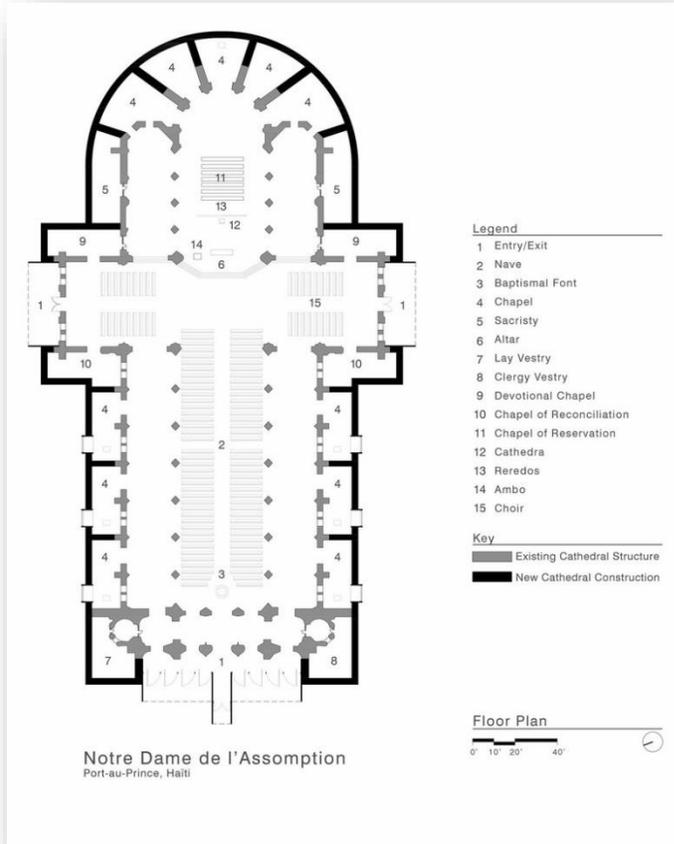


4th Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 8 Year A – Baptism Part Two



*During the early years of Christianity, many of the church leaders or "Fathers" wrote down admonishments and instructions on what it meant to be a follower of Jesus as well as what liturgical ceremonies should be followed for believers living in these early Christian communities. One of these apostolic fathers, whose identity is unknown, wrote such a document entitled, "The Teaching of the (Twelve) Apostles", or as it is referred to today—**The Didache**.*

The Collect

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Confession of Sin

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor...

A short period of silence may be kept

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. *Amen.*

Absolution

Almighty God have mercy on us, † forgive us all our sins
through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all
goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us
in eternal life. *Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer (Traditional)

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

The Gospel

Matthew 10:37-42

Jesus said...Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

Thoughts on Baptism from Fr. Nigel

"Baptism as a way to the freedom of the children of God and as a way to a life in community calls for a personal commitment. There is nothing magical or automatic about this sacrament. Having water poured over us while someone says, "I baptize you in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit," has lasting significance when we are willing to claim and reclaim in all possible ways the spiritual truth of who we are as baptised people."

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Henry J. Newman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

How do we baptize? How did we learn how? Who is baptized? Where do we baptize? And more...

Two weeks ago I defined a sacrament in a very rudimentary way as something tangible that we can see, touch, smell and/or taste that therefore gives us a way to better understand God's grace as it is bestowed upon us. In the case of Baptism, what we can see is water as it is applied in some way on to the person in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Later in the Baptismal service, the Holy Oil of Sacred Chrism which is made of blessed olive oil and balsam is used to make the sign of the cross on the newly baptized person's forehead using the words...

"[Insert here the person's Name, if known], you are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own for ever. Amen."

There are various ways to apply the water. Some traditions see the priest or pastor applying the water with a shell over the baptismal font; others fully immerse the person in a large pool or special walk in font (St. Mary Magdalene RC Church). "Living Water" (streams, rivers, lakes etc.) may be used and was actually preferred in the ancient church. Dick used to describe a yearly baptismal event that occurred in Shadow Lake as offered by one of the local churches. Do you remember the Baptismal scene in "Oh Brother Where Art Thou?"



Why a shell?

One author suggests that the answer may be, “a more practicable one than a scripturally based one”. The symbol of the seashell has been associated with baptism since the early centuries of the Christian church. The use of the shell can be seen in paintings on the walls of the catacombs where many early Christians worshiped. They depict people being baptized with water poured from a seashell.

Ancient people used the scallop shell as a symbol of eternal life and also as a symbol of pilgrimage (some of you may recall this is especially true of the pilgrimage (The Way) to *Santiago de Compostela*). Through the Sacrament of Baptism, we are born to a new life in Christ and are cleansed of sins. Our lives then become a pilgrimage through this world. Union with God in heaven becomes the goal of this journey.

According to our Catechism, The inward spiritual grace given in Baptism is union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God’s family the Church, forgiveness of sins, and new life in the Holy Spirit. As Fr. Aidan has written in his wonderfully colorful piece, this has been going on in the Christian Church for two thousand years. So how did we get here?

We know from the Gospels that Jesus himself was baptized in the River Jordan by John, (Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1: 9-11, and Luke 3:21-22). The ritual cleansing of one’s sins was adopted from the Jewish faith by the Christian Church in what has become the Sacrament of Christian Initiation.

First of all, who was baptized? Fr. Aidan’s writing offers us a glimpse at how the pre-medieval church conducted baptisms as life changing affairs, as well they should be. According to one source, several of the Early Church Fathers taught that infant baptism was quite proper and Origen of Alexandria (c. 184 AD – c. 253 AD) stated that the practice of baptizing infants could be traced back to the apostles themselves.

The Early Church also learned of the practice from sources beyond scripture. There was also information found in the *Didache*, a source thought to be the earliest record of baptismal instruction beyond scripture and it speaks only of adult baptism.

The Didache is one of the earliest Christian documents not found in the New Testament. The name means teaching, and is short for "The Lord's Teaching of the Twelve Apostles". The document was discovered in a monastery in Constantinople and published by P. Bryennios in 1883. The Didache describes early Christian ethics, practices, and instructions including how to administer the sacrament of Baptism.

It provides instructions as follows:

"And concerning baptism, baptize this way: Having first said all these things, baptize into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, in living water. But if you have no living water, baptize into other water; and if you cannot do so in cold water, do so in warm. But if you have neither, pour out water three times upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit. But before the baptism let the baptizer fast, and the baptized, and whoever else can; but you shall order the baptized to fast one or two days before."

Where do we baptize? I will cover church architecture in more detail at a later date but at this moment I would draw your attention to the drawing above (now you know why it is there!), asking that you pay particular attention to the legend that shows #3 to be the Baptismal Font. In the Anglican faith, the design of churches changed over the centuries to accommodate the newer interpretations of the liturgy as each new revision of the Book of Common Prayer was issued.

The changes in liturgical practices that occurred with each new BCP greatly influenced the way the church was laid out. That said, many churches and cathedrals are built in the shape of the cross and face liturgical East (more on this at a later date). Essentially the shape of the church represented how we saw the journey of our lives and how they would be lived in God.

For instance, many Presbyterian churches will position the preaching pulpit where Anglicans traditionally place the high altar. Whereas the followers of protestant reformer John Knox saw the Liturgy of the Word to be a more commonly observed sacramental action than what occurred at "God's Board" (the altar), Anglicans however placed the pulpit off to the side allowing the eye to focus more specifically upon the eternal salvation represented by the Holy Altar and the Reserved Presence of Christ that is typically stored behind it in the Tabernacle or Ambry.

However, many Christian denominations have traditionally placed the Baptismal Font near the entrance of the church. Some continue to do so. Why? Well, if the church's floor plan was to represent our own journey through this life with Christ as our Lord and Savior, then that would begin with our baptism as our entrance into the faith and end with our eternal habitation with God at his Heavenly Banquet as it is depicted with the sacrament of Holy Communion which of

course is celebrated at the Altar. This is why the Sacrament is reserved behind the altar representing everlasting life in Christ.

Thus, life begins with the sacrament (of our) baptism, is repeatedly replenished and fueled by the (sacrament of the) Body and Blood of Christ, then finds its ultimate completion by ending with eternal life in and with him.

As time and prayer books have come and gone, baptisms have become more of a public affair with the faithful wanting and even needing to be present to welcome a new member into the community of Christ. In response the font has been repositioned to the front of the church somewhere near the altar to make viewing and participation much easier. And while the 1928 BCP actually had a service for Private Baptism which was the norm for many centuries, the more modern way of thinking is that as many people as possible should be present with the rubrics on page 298 stating that...

Holy Baptism is appropriately administered within the Eucharist as the chief service on a Sunday or other feast.

Private Baptisms are still allowed under the restrictions of pastoral care. I baptized a newborn baby once that had just undergone open heart surgery and therefore was immune compromised. A small and private gathering of immediate family only was not only appropriate it was necessary.

Do we baptize more than once? No. The rubrics state on page 298 that...

“Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble.”

This means that no matter what may occur during a person’s life, their Baptism cannot be undone. It is essentially a contract with God the Father that we will enter into a life in and with his Son. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that enables all this to take place. Baptism is death into an old way of living and rebirth into a new one with Christ.

There is so much more I could address here on this subject. For instance, I have not talked about sponsors or Godparents, nor about the complexity of the role of the Holy Spirit in all this, nor the practice of deathbed baptisms made popular in the middle ages (the person would have lived a life totally free of sin, albeit a very short one).

The first sacrament we encounter as we become Christians could be considered the most important. Without it Holy Communion is not possible. Or is it? The discussion on “Open Communion”, a condition where the person is known to not have been baptized previously yet is offered the sacrament of Holy Eucharist by the priest, is not a subject I intend to address here today.

But the notion does raise the question, what if a person has not been baptized and following some sort of tragic event requests that they become a Christian prior to their impending demise? Perhaps they are on their deathbed and there is no priest available? The provisions for “Emergency Baptism” are outlined on page 313 of the BCP and are as follows:

In case of emergency, any baptized person may administer Baptism according to the following form.

“Using the given name of the one to be baptized (if known), pour water on him or her, saying...

I baptize you in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord’s Prayer is then said.

Other prayers, such as the following, may be added...

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon this your servant the forgiveness of sin and have raised him to the new life of grace. Strengthen him, O Lord, with your presence, enfold him in the arms of your mercy, and keep him safe for ever.

The person who administers emergency Baptism should inform the priest of the appropriate parish, so that the fact can be properly registered.

If the baptized person recovers, the Baptism should be recognized at a public celebration of the Sacrament with a bishop or priest presiding, and the person baptized under emergency conditions, together with the sponsors or godparents, taking part in everything except the administration of the water.

Even as a priest I have never had to do an emergency baptism despite having stopped on more than one occasion at a particularly nasty automobile accident asking the police if they needed a priest. They replied they did not. That said, it is probably a good thing that everyone becomes familiar with this process as one never knows what may happen.

I have barely begun to approach the subject of Baptism. Perhaps there is no other act that we as Christians do than this amazing Sacrament other than the Holy Eucharist of course. Entire books and other such lengthy works have been devoted to the subject. However, as cursory as it may be, I hope and pray that my work of these two weeks gives you a deeper appreciation for the significance of Holy Baptism.

As this is not a seminary course on Baptism, (although it may be starting to feel like one!), I would refer you to all of the rubrics found on page 298 under the title of “Concerning the Service” as well as the “Additional Directions” on page 312. There may be some items of interest that you might not have considered previously.

If at any time you have specific questions regarding this or any of these weekly missives, please feel free to call, text, or email and I will do my best to answer them either privately, or for the good of the whole group, or both. Based on Baptism taking two weeks and arguably not having covered each and every aspect of this amazing sacrament, I believe it may take two or even three weeks to cover the Holy Eucharist. We shall see.

I leave you with HP Harton's thoughts on the subject:

"If a soul is to advance rightly in the spiritual life it is of the utmost importance that it should realize the effects of Baptism, and endeavor to make the fullest possible use of the grace given thereby... Our union with Christ in Baptism is also a real and living union with the rest of the Body of which we are a part. We are no longer merely individuals, but one with the whole Church on earth and in heaven, and have our part in the life and love and holiness of the Body of Christ."

Closing Prayer

Let us Pray...

All praise and thanks to you, most merciful Father, for adopting us as your own children, for incorporating us into your holy Church, and for making us worthy to share in the inheritance of the saints in light; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.