

Introduction

I want to try and do something very simple and that is to explain to you what baptism means. That is important because parents will only give something to their child if they first have a good understanding of what it is they are giving to them and if they believe it will be good for their child.

If you are unsure about something or believe it will not make any difference to your child's life or will harm them in some way, you will avoid giving it to them. You want to be as sure as you can be that what you are giving to your child will help them to grow, to flourish and to be happy. This is what you as parents are doing all the time.

Do you think baptism is good for your child?

Do you think it will make any difference to your child's life?

Do you think that faith in Jesus Christ is a good thing?

You can only answer these questions if you have some idea what baptism is and the responsibilities that you will agree to publicly and before God on the day of your child's baptism. This formation is to help you make an informed decision about whether you really do want your child to be baptised and have a relationship with Christ through the life of the Church,

NAME OF CHURCH *ST. SIMON'S R.C. CHURCH, PARTICK, GLASGOW.*
 ADDRESS *33 Partick Bridge Street, Glasgow. G11 6PP*

CERTIFICATE OF BAPTISM

Name *MARTIN GERARD BOLAND*
 Parents' Names *Martin John Boland*
Nellie Boland m.s. Gallagher
 Address *60 Lumsden Street, Glasgow*
 Date of Birth *4 May 1966*
 Date of Baptism *22 May 1966*
 Sponsors *Mary Boland*
Gerard Boland
 Officiating Priest *Rev. Fr. Edward Kelly*
 Date of Confirmation *22/6/1977, in Our Lady of Victories, Kensington.*
 Signed *Fr. John Chalmers* Date of Issue *28/3/1995*



Here is my baptismal certificate. It gives some basic details and records that on a particular date, in a particular church, I was baptized. This certificate is evidence of a religious event. But looking at this piece of paper wouldn't help you answer the question of whether baptism has made any difference to my life or, more importantly, been good for me.

One of the most famous commands of Jesus to his disciples is when he says, "Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Two thousand years later and you are here on a Saturday morning enquiring about baptism for your child because of that command of Jesus.

The word baptism comes from a Greek word "baptizein". Literally, it means, to plunge. At the time of Jesus, baptisms would have taken place at rivers or lakes. People would have come to the banks of these rivers, stripped off, and been plunged into the water.

We have detailed accounts of Christ's baptism in the Gospels. In Luke's Gospel the account ends with these words:

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved;-with you I am well pleased."

So the first thing to say is that baptism is a gift from God. It is not something that humans have created to mark a child's birth. Baptism is God's initiative. God coming to us so that we can share in His life and glory. It is not the priest who baptizes your child, it is Jesus who plunges your child into His life and your child becomes beloved, a child of God.

I mentioned rivers and lakes. Water has always been central to a baptism. Water is poured over the child or adult who is baptized. What is the significance of that? Water helps us to understand two remarkable things that happen at our baptism:

Baptised into the death and resurrection of Christ

The first is that at our baptisms we are plunged into the death and resurrection of Christ.



In 2022 two sixteen year olds, Reuven Simon and Joseph Sebastian, went for a swim in a lough in Northern Ireland. It appears that one of them had started to struggle with the currents and depth of the water. His friend jumped into to try to save him. Both tragically died. Water can prove deadly to human beings. It is a symbol of death.

Human beings can find themselves in the deep waters of sin, all those currents that pull us away from God's life of light and love into the darkness of lies, selfishness and fear. Watch 24 hours news for evidence of this or look honestly in the darker places of your minds and hearts. We find ourselves out of our depth and gasping for the clean air of beauty, goodness and truth. Sometimes, we may even sense that we were going under and that we will be swallowed up by this darkness.

But God had a rescue plan for us. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from sin and death. Jesus took the plunge. He took hold of us and offered to lift us from those black waters. All we have to do is to accept the offer and He would take us safely home, to be with our heavenly Father. Put simply, the baptized would be saved.

Water is a symbol of death but it is also a symbol of life. We cannot live without water; we wither and eventually die. Without water there is no life. With water, life is possible. It is for this reason that scientists presently search the universe hoping to find microscopic evidence of water...because where there is water, there is life.

Jesus calls himself the living water and at a baptism our souls are drenched for the first time in his life but, as with any living thing, they then need to be continually watered throughout our earthly lives so that we do not spiritually wither or even die.

Water is a symbol of death and life. In a baptism we are plunged into the death of Christ and we rise to the new life of His resurrection. We not only become God's beloved. We become the saved. We are made for eternal life.

A spiritual rebirth

The second remarkable thing is that we are reborn, given a spiritual birth and become children of the family of God, the Church.

The mothers here carried their children in their wombs for nine months. That life was suspended and nourished in water or amniotic fluid. It also protected your child. In the womb, your child grew both physically and mentally.

The womb of the Church is the baptismal font. It's waters nourish and protect us so that we may grow spiritually because we believe that a human being is created as a unity of body and soul. Unique among all creatures, we are capable of knowing and loving God.

At the same time, we are linked to everyone, living and dead, who has ever been born from this spiritual womb. The baptized are our spiritual brothers and sisters. We form a huge family of faith and this is known as the Church.

And just as you only give birth to your child once. In the same way, you can only be reborn once by baptism. You cannot be baptized again and again.

But just as with the physical birth of your child, you don't cut the umbilical cord and think to yourself, "job done, I'm out of here." Your child's physical birth is not an end in itself but it marks the beginning of the relationship that your child will have with you its parents and you with your child for the rest of your lives.

In the same way, Baptism isn't an end in itself, you don't pour a bit of water and take a few photos and think "job done", but your child's baptism marks the beginning of the spiritual relationship that you and your

child will have with Jesus through the life of his Catholic Church.

Of course, we are all aware that parents can choose to have a very poor physical or emotional relationship with their children. They may be neglectful or absent from their child's life. They may inflict indelible, small or large, physical or psychological injuries. We are also aware of the long term detrimental effect that can scar the life of that child and remain with them into adulthood.

In the same way, parents can choose to have a very poor relationship with God and the Church for themselves and their child. When this happens, their souls are scarred and injured. The children become less alive. Without the practice of their faith, their child's relationship with God is stillborn.

The Practice of Faith

Let me end by saying something about the practice of your faith. In the service of baptism, parents will be asked by the priest or deacon if you accept the responsibility of training your child in the practice of the faith. It's a very specific question and, I think, it requires an honest answer. Let me tease it apart so that you are clear what you are being asked.

To practice something means to do it again and again until it begins to shape and form who you are. Think about education. Your children will go to school every day, not only when they feel like it, intermittently or very occasionally. Learning involves doing something

repeatedly, regularly in order for it to make a difference to your life. In fact, we consider education to be so important that there is a legal obligation that children are educated.

In the same way there is a spiritual obligation that all Catholics attend Mass every Sunday. You shall keep the Sabbath Day holy is a commandment of God. The Sabbath for Catholics is Sunday when Christ invites us to deepen our friendship with him at Holy mass. There, Jesus feeds us with his living word and with Holy Communion, the Body and Blood of Christ. Sunday Mass is where the baptized celebrate the death and resurrection of Christ. It is the day of the Lord.

Some final words

I will baptize your child.

If you are not practicing your faith, I ask you to come back to the practice of your faith and to do so without hesitation. I ask you to come back to Christ and to rebuild your friendship with him through your participation at Sunday Mass, the practice of your faith.

If you are not practicing your faith and you have no intention of practising your faith, if you have no interest in a relationship with Christ and His Church, if you do not believe that baptism makes any difference to our lives or is not a good, then you must ask yourself why do you want your child to be baptised? To those people, all I can do is ask you not to make a

mockery of this holy sacrament and the relationship with Jesus that many of us hold so dear.

And to the non-Catholics. In a previous parish, I had a family – mum, dad, three children aged at the time something like 7, 5 and 2 - who came to Mass every Sunday. They were a blessing on the community. The mum was the Catholic. The dad was Jewish. Now he could have quite easily have said to his wife on a Sunday morning, you go to Mass with the kids and I'll stay at home and read the Jewish Chronicle. But he didn't. He was there. He did believe in God though he didn't believe that Jesus is the Son of the Living God. But most of all he did believe in family. He did believe that where his wife and children were, he would be right alongside them. For the non-Catholics here, the non-believers here, who might think that what I have said does not apply to you, it does because this is your child.

If you are practising your faith. Thank you. I do not underestimate the challenges and demands in your lives and your decision to make God a priority in your family's life. Thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you for your witness.



In the church is a picture of St John Henry Newman. He was one of the most talked about and celebrated men of the nineteenth century. In John Henry Newman's church in Rome, *San Giorgio al Velabro*, there is a modest plaque which celebrates all his honours: writer, theologian, fellow of an Oxford College, convert to Catholicism, Priest, Cardinal...but it concludes with these words: *Sed ante omnia Christianus*. They translate: *But above all else, a Christian*.

He was a Christian because of his baptism into the life of Christ. For him baptism not only made a real difference to his life and was a good but his baptism

was the most important thing in his life because it began his life long relationship with Christ and his Catholic Church.

I pray that with your support and your example, your child's baptism will also mark the beginning of their life of friendship with the Jesus, the Son of the living God.

When Saint Pope John Paul II was asked what was the most important day in his life, he replied: "The day I was baptised". A couple of years ago, during a parish pilgrimage to Poland, we visited the parish and prayed by the font where St John Paul II was baptised. Here is a picture of it. **PPT** Being there was a profoundly moving experience and reminded me of my own baptism. The moment my life as a disciple of Christ began. I pray that you and one day your child will be able to say that their baptism was the most important day of their life.

The greatest dignity of any Christian is to be baptised. This is a photo of Blessed John Henry Newman. One of the celebrated thinkers and theologians of the 19th century. A famous and celebrated man. In Blessed John Henry Newman's church in Rome, San Giorgio al Velabro, there is a modest plaque which celebrates all his honours. It concludes with these words: *Sed ante omnia Christianus*. They translate: But above all else, a Christian. His baptism was more important to him than being a Cardinal or a fellow of an Oxford College.

PPT. A baptismal certificate

A baptismal certificate shows that on a particular date, you or your child were baptized...plunged into the life of Christ. It was the moment of Christian birth, rebirth in Christ. But it doesn't tell you anything about how you started to be educated and formed in being a disciple of Christ...how you actually live your life as a disciple of Christ.

PPT. Birth Certificate

You will also have stashed away somewhere a birth certificate for yourself and your child and that simply shows that you were born on a particular date. It doesn't tell you anything about how you developed and matured as a human being...how you actually live and relate and communicate as a human being.

Both birth and baptism have similarities. You can only be baptized once in your life. You can't be baptized lots of times. It happens once but the effect should spill out on to the rest of your life. It's the same as giving birth. You only gave birth once to your child – thank goodness say all the mums here – but you don't say after a birth, job done, I'm out here. The birth is just the beginning of that relationship – good or bad or

somewhere in between-you will have with your child for as long as you are alive. Baptism marks the beginning of that relationship a person has or does not have with Christ and his Church for as long as they are alive.

What is really important is the practice of your faith. It is that real and living relationship with Christ, through His church, that is important.

Imagine if, from the moment of their birth, you only saw your child for one hour every year. On Christmas Eve, you would be taken to a room. The door would be opened and you would walk in. Your child would be there, sitting at a table. A year older. You a year older and you would spend one hour with them. After the hour, you would be taken out. The door closed and you would wait until the next Christmas Eve to see them again.

Now, of course you would have a biological relationship with them. You are their biological parents. They are your child. But could you describe it as a real, loving and deep relationship?

In the same way, I'd suggest that a relationship with Christ that is infrequent or intermittent can hardly be called a real and close relationship. It is that relationship that makes us Catholics.

PPT: Heart

Some people say that they feel they are Catholics in their hearts. They are right in one sense. Christ is in our hearts. But if you never see him, never hear him, never spend time in His presence and be loved by him...that feeling is little more than a sentimental notion or a vague way of identifying yourself.

It would be like saying that your wife is in your heart while you never see her, never communicate with her and never spend any proper time with her. She may be in your heart. But that's

the only place she is. She is certainly not in your life and you are not in her life.

When we say "God is in my heart". It sounds nice...but that's all it sounds...because what it truly in our hearts is revealed by our actions. God will live in our hearts, but only if we are willing to enter into his sacred heart. God will never force his way into our hearts, he'll never bully his way in, he's always waiting for us to come to him, to open our hearts and lives to him. He's waiting for us to come into his sacred presence....to practice our faith.

5. PPT Novak Djokovic

Let me introduce you to Novak Djokovic. In my view, the best tennis player in the world today. But to become the best tennis player in the world, he spent – especially in his youth – hours watching others play, reading about tennis and listening to his coach. But that's not all he did. He picked up a tennis racket and put what he had learnt into practise. He began to hit balls, perfect his backhand, fine tune his serve and so on. He did it again and again. Every day. And this is the important thing: all that practise started to shape and change him as a person. Until playing tennis became second nature to him.

That's true when we practice anything in life. Your children practising the recorder or violin. Screeching away. Hitting bum notes...giving up...being bored by practising scales...being encouraged, challenged and, sometimes, made to do it...but then, with practice, getting a tune out of the instrument, taking pleasure in playing, joining an orchestra and so on. Practicing to dribble a football and strike it, doing it again and again, turning up for training, and eventually playing in the team. Practicing something over time changes us.

Of course, if I only dig out my tennis racket when Wimbledon is on and the minute Wimbledon is over stick it back in the cupboard...if I only take that violin out of its case once in a

blue moon...if I think about football, but never actually show up for football training...if I don't practise, then nothing changes in my life. I do not grow, develop or mature.

Practising Catholics do something again and again, week in, week out, whether they feel like it or not. What they do is they come into Christ's presence. They listen to his words. Jesus speaking to us through the Sacred Scriptures. Jesus teaching us with his own words and actions, his death and resurrection. They are also fed by him. He gives them his body and his blood and although it looks like we are consuming him, he, in fact, is consuming us, taking us up into His divine life...and this is the miracle, if our hearts are in any way open, we begin to change and we become more Christ like: more gentle, more forgiving, more just, more loving...more Christ like, more Catholic. Practicing our faith means that we are shaped and formed by Christ. If you like, His divine life rubs off on ours. Practice makes perfect...yes, perfect like our Heavenly Father.

Now the only place that this happens is at Sunday Mass. What I have described does not happen in the middle of Sainsbury's or at the school gate or on the commute to work. It happens over there, every Sunday. It's there that Christ, our high priest, waits for us. Waiting to teach us and forms us. Waiting to feed us and transform us.

Today I have seen a Cathedral full of practising Catholics. People just like you. Busy. Tired. Enjoying life. Sometimes, struggling with life. Most of the time, getting on with life...but all of them anchoring their lives in Christ for an hour each week. Yep, and they struggled to get the kids dressed and to Mass. Yep, they had the nightmare challenge of the Brentwood Cathedral car park. Yep, it doesn't always feel like a spiritual high (because most of the time it isn't)...but they are here, in Christ's presence, faithfully, practicing their faith and doing that, not on their own, but as part of a community.

We do not meet Christ alone. We meet him with each other, as the church, a Catholic community and parish. The Eucharist is our Sunday meal where we sit down together as family. We don't do it to feel good, to get something out of it, to make others think better of us...we do it to be in Christ's presence and to thank him for what he has given and done for us. It's an act of gratitude. The word "Eucharist" means thanksgiving. Practising Catholics are those people, young and old, who are learning to say "thank you" to God.

If you are not practising your faith, then the most important part of these coming months is that you start to practise your faith...that you come to Mass on a Sunday...that you show that you are serious about this great sacrament of baptism.

Sed ante omnia Christianus

But above all else, a Christian.

Let us celebrate our greatest dignity

that we are baptised

that above all else we are Christians

and proud to be so

Let us celebrate this fact not just in here, but by living those baptismal promise with renewed vigour out there.