

Dear People of St. Andrew the Apostle:

Beginning this week we are beginning a homily series and a catechetical series on the Sacraments of the Church. My hope is that you will find it interesting, challenging, and helpful to your understanding of the Church. May God bless you during this time.

## THE SACRAMENTAL NATURE OF THE CHURCH

A “sacrament” is an external sign (something that can be seen, felt, experienced physically) instituted by Christ (given to us as gift from our Savior) to give grace (to help people grow in relationship with God).

The Church, itself, is sacramental in nature. We are an external sign instituted by Christ which gives grace through strengthening our own faith and drawing others to come to know, love and serve Jesus in this world. The Church is the “people of God” and, therefore, we are sacramental in nature as well – set apart and given to the world as gift to remind the world that God exists and loves all people.

How well we live our lives as signs of the presence of God is dependent upon how well we accept the grace of the seven sacraments given to us to grow in faith. These seven Sacraments are:

1. Baptism
2. Confirmation
3. Eucharist
4. Reconciliation
5. Anointing of the Sick
6. Marriage
7. Holy Orders



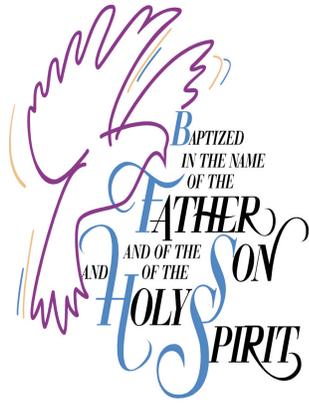
Over the course of the next few weeks we hope to explore the history, meaning, and effect of each of the seven Sacraments.



## *The Sacrament of Baptism*

The Sacrament of Baptism has roots in the earliest Scriptures. God chose to send water upon the earth at Creation, creating the source of life. God chose to “cleanse” the earth of evil in the Great Flood, sparing only Noah and his family and animals. Water gives life, and water takes away life, and water cleanses.

The earliest story of Baptism in the Gospels is when Jesus comes to John the Baptist and asks to be baptized. John is performing a ritual cleansing, calling people to turn their lives around (repent) and be ready for the coming of the Messiah. It is believed that John the Baptist was from the Essene community that lived near the Dead Sea in the Holy Land, and that this community performed a ritual washing when accepting new members. The ritual cleansed people of their past life and celebrated the beginning of a new life.



Why did Jesus, who certainly did not need to be baptized, come to John the Baptist? It is clear that Jesus is initiating something new, but at the same time initiating something that is rooted in Jewish faith and tradition. The Baptism also reveals the Trinitarian nature of God: Jesus, the Son of God, together with the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, and the voice of the Father heard from heaven. Jesus will later commission his apostles and empower them to celebrate His followers' embrace of the new life of faith in Baptism, being cleansed from their former way of life and adopting a new way of life. This new Baptism is to be accomplished in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

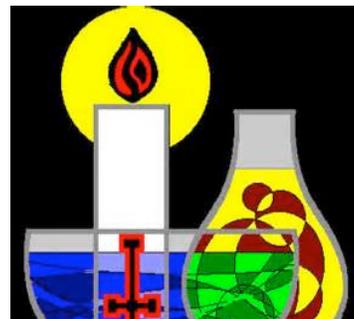
#### WHAT HAPPENS IN BAPTISM?

There are two forms of Baptism:

1. Baptism of an Adult, who professes their faith, gives testimony to their change of life, and is embraced by the Church.
2. Baptism of an Infant, whose parents and godparents promise to raise them in the faith, profess their own faith, and take on the ministry of forming the child in the faith.

Both involve the following elements:

- Incorporation into the Body of Christ
- Scripture
- Profession of Faith
- Baptism by Water
- Anointing with Chrism
- Presentation of a Candle lit from the Easter Candle
- Wearing of a White Garment



The anointing with Chrism signifies that the person is now called to live in the world as

- PRIEST – to embody the reality of Christ, to grow in holiness, to help others grow in holiness
- PROPHET – to not conform ourselves to this age but to live the Gospel in both a personal and a social way. To work for justice and peace.
- KING – to participate in bringing about the Kingdom of God here on earth.

The presentation of the Candle lit from the Easter Candle reminds us that we are called to allow the light of Christ to dwell within us, inflame our hearts with passion for the Lord and His work, and keep the light of Christ alive within us. The White Garment is an exterior sign of the dignity to which Christ calls us as His followers.

May God bless us all as we explore the gifts of the Sacraments in our lives.

Fr. John