

Beginning at the Beginning: Baptism 202

Continuing our consideration of the sacrament of Baptism, there are three other points of particular interest and significance that stand out, two of which are new since the changes introduced after the Second Vatican Council, one of which has always been the case, but which is newly emphasized. These have to do with the parents of children to be baptized as first teachers of their children in the ways of faith (not new), who holds the baby during the celebration of Baptism and adult baptism the norm. We'll look at the first of these this week, and the other two next.

Twice in the *Rite of Baptism for Children* the parents of an infant or minor child being baptized are addressed about their primary role in the faith formation of their child: *You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training her/him in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring her/him up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you clearly understand what you are undertaking?* And again, *You have come to present this child for baptism. On your part you must make it your constant care to bring her/him up in the practice of the faith.* The Church has always recognized the primary role of parents in the faith formation of their children. But this point has received particular emphasis since the Council in response to the common mistaken thinking and practice that turned over much of the responsibility for children's faith formation to religion classes in Catholic schools, or to parish based religious education programs. Parents got into the habit of simply "dropping off" their kids at church for R.E. classes or at a Catholic school, leaving it up to the school or parish RE volunteers to teach them what they need to know. But leaving children's faith formation to such "professional" or formal programs results in the reduction of their faith formation to classrooms and textbooks, questions and answers, rather than an experience of faith integrated with the whole of life. The great challenge of this emphasis and insistence on the parents' responsibility for their child's faith formation is that parents themselves must first be formed, active, and growing in their faith. Which leads to the other two points I will take up next week, adult baptism as the norm for baptism, and who holds the baby during the rite of baptism.

Please let us know what else about our faith tradition you'd like to find out more about.
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