



« The Baptismal Call »

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PASTORAL LETTER
OF
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FOR PENTECOST SUNDAY
JUNE 4, 2006

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This is my thirteenth Pentecost pastoral letter to you. Today, I would like to reflect with you on the wonderful calling which resounded in us on the day of our baptism and which is part of God's kindnesses for humankind. Our story – like that of all the people of God – is a sacred history, and it is good for us to our own lives today within this great ocean of God's love. His love is truly from age to age! Let us first remember the Pentecost Event. Fifty days after their exodus from Egypt, God made a covenant with His new people at Sinai. Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, the Spirit manifests Himself in Jerusalem in a very special way.

THE WONDERS OF GOD

In the Acts of the Apostles Saint Luke the Evangelist describes with scrupulous care the Pentecost Event. We should read over again this narrative which tells us of the wonders that took place that day and still continue today. "Each of us hears them speaking in his own tongue about the wonders God has accomplished," the thousands of people present at the event exclaimed. Following Peter's discourse outlining in broad strokes the history of salvation, the people's hearts were touched and they asked the Apostles: "What are we to do, brothers?" And Peter answered: "You must reform and be

baptised each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is for you and your children that the promise was made, and to all those still far off whom the Lord our God calls." Upon hearing these words, they asked to be baptised, and that day about three thousand joined the fledgling community.

OUTLINE OF THIS PASTORAL LETTER

I would first like to recall the moments that followed the Edmundston Diocesan Synod (1987-1990). With the desire to better explain "A Heritage to Discover and Share," in September, 1992 this priority was adopted, and as a consequence of this there were "great missions" in several parishes, missions focussed on a discovery of baptism. Secondly, I shall let three people who are remarkable for their theological and pastoral experience to give us a summary of those elements they consider "major," in talking about baptism. Thirdly, I invited some in the diocese to give a short testimony about their own baptism. Finally, I shall give a few pastoral guidelines and directives for our diocesan Church. May this Letter help us better grasp the wonderful work of Christ's Passover, in which we share through baptism.

PART ONE

A Heritage to Discover and Share

“We who have received the Gospel are given the mission of proclaiming this Good News of salvation by the witness of our lives. May our faith be active, may our charity be inventive, may our hope hold fast so that the name of Jesus the Christ be everywhere proclaimed, for the joy and salvation of the world.” These were the concluding words of the closing rite at the launching of the pastoral priority, on September 13, 1992. Several weeks later, on November 1, 1992, the parish evangelisation missions began. I had the privilege of taking part in this mission, along with Eudist confreres, Marist priests, and diocesan clergy.

DISTRESS CALL

Disciples of Saint John Eudes (1601-1680), the Eudists were not ignorant of the truly “alarming” distress call sounded by their founder regarding the people’s ignorance of baptism. “It is deplorable to the point of shedding tears of blood, to observe that of the great number of people on earth who have been baptised and, consequently, have become children of God, members of Jesus Christ and living temples of the Holy Spirit, and obliged to live in conformity with these divine qualities, they are more numerous those who live as beasts, pagans, and even devils than those who live as true Christians. What is the cause of this great evil? There are many causes, but one of the main ones is that the greater number of these Christians is wrapped up in such a dense cloud and such colossal ignorance of things belonging to their profession [of Christians], that they don’t even know what it means to have been baptised.

They do not know what it is to be Christian. They are hardly aware of the indescribable graces and unfathomable favours that God has given them through the sacrament of baptism. They spend their whole lives without thinking at all about the solemn promises they made to His Divine Majesty, and to the very important obligations to which they committed themselves.”

COVENANT

Referring to the “covenant contract” entered upon by the Holy Trinity and the baptised, Saint John Eudes recalls God’s many covenants in favour of humankind, whether with Noah and Abraham our father in the faith, with Moses and the liberated people, or the great covenant announced by the prophets and brought to fruition by the blood of Christ. Like a good Norman Frenchman, Saint John Eudes spoke to the people of his time about something he knew well about: contracts. On the one hand he establishes God’s “promises” to every baptised person, and the baptised person’s promises to God. This trinitarian relationship is very alive. It is for this reason that throughout the six days of the great mission we studied the following themes: “Called by the Father, united to Jesus, energised by the Spirit and sent into the world.” This was a recapitulation of Eudist teaching, a teaching that is still timely, if we are to trust the many editions of the works of Saint John Eudes, both in Europe and in America; these writings which contributed to the seventeenth-century Christian renewal can help us renew our vision of baptism.

“CALLED BY THE FATHER”

We are God the Father’s beloved. In looking at us, the Father sees His Son Jesus. He sees us as His beloved daughters and sons. This is a great mystery of faith, a mystery of love, a mystery of deep unity. Not a single human being is rejected: all our brothers and sisters on earth are invited to live this profound unity that exists between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. “God the Father having granted you the honour of entering into a covenant with Him by baptism as one of His children and as a member of His Son, He is obliged to look upon you with the same eyes, love you with the same heart and lavish upon you the same love He bestows on the beloved Son... Since then, His fatherly eyes have been constantly upon you... His heart, constantly engaged in loving you, His power, wisdom and goodness have ceaselessly been at work protecting and guiding you, and dispensing infinite blessings, corporal as well as spiritual, upon you... What love, what kindness, what praise and thanksgiving must you render Him for so many favours! May all of the Lord’s mercies towards the children of man and all the wonders He works for them praise and glorify Him!” Beloved brothers and sisters in God, since the Father loves us so, let us acknowledge this marvel, let us go, like the baptised Jesus, and bear this good news to the people here and away, let us bring this Good News to the whole world.

“UNITED TO JESUS”

We are so united to Jesus through baptism that we can say with Saint Paul: “I no longer live: it is Christ who lives in me.” Jesus must be alive in us, and we must live in him only, our lives must be a continuation and an expression

of the life of Jesus. We are sisters and brothers of Jesus, people of his race, his blood, even of his family tree. Our history is mixed up in that of Jesus, and his history is mixed up in ours. Since God the Son took flesh in Jesus, everything has taken on a new meaning. Since God entered into a covenant with humankind, we have become intimately united to Him. A Christian is a member of Jesus Christ. Through baptism, we are one with him in body, we are incorporated to him, we form a single body with him. What we have become is unbelievable. Saint John Eudes writes: “When he welcomed you into his covenant as one of his members, the Son of God pledged himself to look upon you, love and treat you as a part of himself, bone of his bones, flesh of his flesh, spirit of his spirit, as a person who is one with him. He pledged to give you his eternal Father as your own father... He pledged to give you his most holy Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, to be your Mother. He pledged to give you his church to also be your Mother. He pledged to give you his flesh and his blood in the holy Eucharist as nourishment for your soul...He pledged to give you his own name and endow you with the most excellent qualities he received from his Father. For he is indeed the Son of God, *They will be called children of God and that is what they are* (1 John 3:1)”.

“ENERGISED BY THE SPIRIT”

At our baptism, we were called by the Father to enter into a new and eternal covenant. We are henceforth united to Jesus forever. We are incorporated to Christ, we are one with him. The Spirit of God also immersed our hearts, we are animated by the Spirit because he was abundantly given to us. “Unless you are born of water and the Spirit, you cannot enter the

kingdom of God,” Jesus said to Nicodemus. “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is Spirit.” During that meeting with Nicodemus, Jesus recalled the marvels of the new covenant: “God has so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that all who believe in him live and have eternal life.” The Holy Spirit was given to us, writes Saint John Eudes, to be spirit of our spirit, heart of our hearts, and soul of our souls, and to be always with us and in us, not only as in his temple but as a part of his own body, that is, as a part of the body of Jesus Christ, which is his own and which must be energised by him... After Our Lord ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit came into the world to form and establish the Body of Christ which is his Church, and to give it the fruit of his life, his blood, his passion and his death. The Holy Spirit comes into our baptism to form Jesus Christ in us, to incorporate, give us birth and make us live in him, to animate us, inspire us, and direct and guide us in all we think, say, do and suffer as a Christian and for God.”

“SENT INTO THE WORLD”

On the day of the inauguration of his ministry as successor of Peter, the late Pope John Paul II sent an invitation to the whole world, an invitation repeated later by Pope Benedict XVI: “Brothers and sisters, do not be afraid to welcome Christ and to accept his power. Do not be afraid! Open, open wide the doors to Christ, to his saving power, open the borders of States, economic and political systems, the vast areas of culture, civilisation, and development. Do not be afraid! Christ knows what there is in man, and he alone knows. Today, man ignores too often what he carries in him, in the depths of his spirit and his heart. He is so often uncertain of the meaning of his

life on earth, he is overwhelmed by doubting that leads to despair. I beg and implore you humbly and trustingly, to allow Christ to speak to man. He alone has the words of everlasting life.” Called by the Father, united to Jesus, energised by the Spirit, we are sent into the world to open paths to Christ, to prepare a path for the Lord, to level the way of the Lord. A song of Michel Scouarnec called “God among Men” draws the major elements of every baptised person’s mission in the midst of the world: “To talk about your Father’s love, who will use your voice? To follow the path of the poor, who will have your heart? To be light to the world, who will have your eyes? To be the joy of your brothers, who will have your hands? To be starved for justice, who will want your hunger? To overcome the weight of hatred, who will want your cross? To be salt of the earth, who will take your body? To live your life today, who will live of you?”

SIGNS OF THE COVENANT

As we consider in our hearts these high points of the great missions of evangelisation experienced in the diocese of Edmundston, we can end this first part of the pastoral letter in the words of this song of the Centre Alpec: “If you receive the gift of God, you become a sign of the covenant. If you share the love of God, you are His presence in the world. God’s beloved Son, the Spirit of Jesus transforms your life. Come and attach yourself to the tree of life, come and share in the joy of the believers, come and labour in the workplace of the Church. God gives you the gift of taking the Word; God gives you the gift of witnessing. God gives you the gift of speaking the truth. You are prophet, you are inheritance; you are prophet, you are promise; you are prophet, you do the truth. God gives

you the gift of discovering a brother. God gives you the gift of having a brother to invite. God gives you the gift of brothers to meet. God gives you the gift: chosen race, you carry the world; chosen race, you offer the world; chosen race, you consecrate the world. God gives you the gift of reassuring man. God gives you the gift of consoling man. God gives you the gift of liberating man. You become master to surrender to his people.” Several aspects of the mission we were given at

baptism are summarised here. We were sealed with Holy Chrism, as these words were said: “God the Father has freed you from sin, given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and welcomed you into his holy people. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life.”

TWO DESIRES

As we conclude this first part, I have two desires:

- 1 – That those who took part in the Great Missions (1992 and 1993) recollect what they experienced and retained, and share it with those around them.
- 2 – That in the case of a “major campaign of evangelisation” occurring, an important place be given to the marvel of baptism.

PART TWO

A Teaching to Receive

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to those who submitted their reflections on the subject of baptism. I had asked them to write a few pages' summary on what they deemed to be the most important points for deepening their understanding of the reality of baptism. With you, brothers and sisters, I welcome this most important teaching. The first reflection is by Sister Claire Lafrance, F.M.A., coordinator

of the School of Pastoral Formation in Edmundston; the second is from Sister Marie-Thérèse Nadeau, C.N.D., professor at the Dominican College in Ottawa; and the third is by Father Lucien Robitaille, professor emeritus at Laval University. Once again I thank them most gratefully.

What Does Christian Baptism Have to do with Human Life?

An answer to this question requires that we consider the human person. What do we all seek, if not happiness? But then there arises another question: How can we be happy, with all that limits us, hampers our progress, and opposes our deepest yearnings?

We are created in the image of God. What the Book of Genesis says (Gn. 1:26) is not trivial. It follows that such a beginning entails for us a special, incomparable and extraordinary vocation to which it is impossible to respond with the very intervention of the One who has, we could say, inserted it into our genes. We all know through experience that this ideal inscribed in the depths of our being cannot be achieved without returning to our depths where the Holy Spirit resides. We are born as if exiled from ourselves, exposed to what is foreign to us and which leads us, fashions us, and imprisons us.

Called to be truly sons and daughters of God, the human being seeks – at times without realising it – the path to the Father because the human being knows instinctively that it is in Him only that the happiness sought can be found. Like the younger son in the parable (Lk. 15), we must come back home. That is where one finds oneself and where one's being will be fully fulfilled, where one will be truly happy. "Leave your country," God said to Abraham. (Gn. 12:1). "Go to the land that I will show you, the unknown land that awaits you." Experience teaches that this return is in reality a turning back, a conversion.

But then, what is this conversion?

It is a decision to progress towards a state of communion with God. This is a major enterprise, and it cannot be achieved by one's own strength alone. This decision challenges the darkness of one's own heart and directs it in the direction of the Light. The Holy Spirit does his work. The human being is in need of salvation, he/she *needs* God's Salvation. In other words, God alone will be able to change His creature's heart, call him/her back to Him, and achieve the project He has had for His

creature from the very moment of his/her conception. And then Jesus Christ appears, Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, the One who came to gather together the children-of-God-becoming, and give them everything they need to be with him, in him, and to follow him as true sons and daughters of God.

Such a vocation is ignored by most humans who hardly know about it. However, the Church was given the secret of this filiation and of the path that leads to happiness. The Church was given by her Master the mission to immerse in Christ every human of every nation: “Go and teach all nations, and baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:19).

It seems to me that we can consider Christian baptism as a *call* to live as sons and daughters of God and as a *decision to answer that call* by following Jesus Christ. If someone receives that inescapable call from God, if he/she knows Jesus who alone can lead one to the Father, that person is addressing the Church. This Church welcomes and baptises him/her. Baptism is, therefore, a response to God’s love and a proclamation of one’s decision to follow Christ, “the first-born of all creation” (Col. 1:15). “Sell everything and follow me” ! (Mt. 19:21) Baptism is the gateway to discipleship. Through it, we bind ourselves to Christ who totally clears every obstacle, to Christ the “bar-abbas,” the son of the Father in us. I have always loved the metaphor of the caterpillar changing into a butterfly, in talking about the development of what we are from the moment of our conception.

Christian baptism is, therefore, an act of the Father who calls, of the Son who saves, of the Church that welcomes, and of the person who answers “yes”. Such beautiful cooperation! Such work of communion! If one of these “actors” is missing, there is no baptism. God created us partners, and this is a wonderful example of God’s loving will.

Christian baptism is the undertaking of a journey towards our final achievement willed by God in His great love, a journey of perfect communion with Him. Baptism, in fact, is the most beautiful gift that a human being can receive. My wish would be that all those who have received it welcome it and develop it, so that the grace of God not be in vain.

– Claire Lafrance, F.M.A.

A Fundamental Relationship with Christ and One’s Brothers and Sisters

When I am asked about baptism, today, I cannot help but think somewhat sadly about the definition memorised years ago, from our catechism: “Baptism makes us children of God and of the Church, and heirs to heaven.” But why this sadness? Isn’t it a beautiful definition of baptism? What was wrong with it? Wasn’t it enough to aim at being a child of God and a member of the ecclesial community, while awaiting eternal life?

As a matter of fact, what bothers me with this old definition isn’t that it is wrong but that it fails to mention that filiation with the Father and fellowship with one’s brothers and sisters would never be possible nor effected, if baptism did not give us first and foremost, and

fundamentally so, the possibility of developing a relationship with Christ. This is serious: Christ had been left out of the picture! Yet, the New Testament clearly states that we are “baptised in the name of Jesus” (1 Co. 1:11-15, 6:11; Ac. 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, 19:5), and “baptised in Christ” (Ga. 3:27-29; Rm. 6:3). This is where it all begins, and the rest cannot be understood without this starting point.

Baptism establishes a fundamental relationship between the baptised and Christ. More precisely, to take into consideration the two expressions mentioned above, the baptised person is turned over to Christ and becomes his property, belonging to him in a very narrow sense. Saint Paul says that the baptised becomes “one in being with Christ” (Rm. 6:5). And this is not all. Not only is the baptised united to the “person” of Christ, but also to his “destiny,” that is, to his death and resurrection (Rm. 6; Col. 2). In other words, baptism gives the person the possibility of sharing in the two-fold dimension of Christ’s Passover, death to sin and life for God. Mysteriously, but no less truly, the power of Christ’s death and resurrection touches and transforms the baptised to the point that he or she can affirm he/she lives his/her own paschal event, his/her own passage from death to life. What was accomplished historically in Christ’s body on the cross is “sacramentally” realised in the Christian. This is not literature or just a pious thought! Not at all. In baptism we “really” die and we “really” rise with Christ (Rm. 6:11). There is evidently nothing magical about baptism. Although truly dead and raised up again, one can never rest satisfied. In fact, the fullness of this eternal life already begun is given to us on condition of our being faithful to our commitments. Can we blame God for calling on our freedom and responsibility?

If we the baptised only knew how deep death to sin is, in us! In his death, Christ not only destroyed sins but also sin itself, that is, Sin as Power, at the source of all our sins. Or, if you prefer, Christ overcame Sin at its root. So, from the moment the Christian dies with Christ at baptism, he/she is also in the process of dying to the domination of sin. Of course, because of his/her freedom, the baptised can still sin, though he/she received all that was necessary – that is, the Holy Spirit – to resist sin. Therefore, the more one lets oneself be moved daily by the Holy Spirit, the less one sins. Doesn’t this make sense?

You have guessed it, it is because we rise again with Christ that we are given the Spirit. The Bible tells us, as a matter of fact, that the risen Christ lives according to the Spirit (Rm. 1:4), and that he is life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 14:45). One thing is certain, several New Testament passages talk of baptism as a gift of the Spirit (Ac. 9:17-19; 1 Cor. 12:13; Tt. 3:5-6). Well, it is this Spirit that makes us sons and daughters of the Father, brothers and sisters to one another. On the one hand, the Spirit received at baptism sets the believer in the same relationship Jesus had with his Father and which allowed him to call the Father “Abba” (Rm. 8:14-17). On the other hand, the same Spirit received by all at baptism ensures ecclesial communion (1 Cor. 12:13). One should certainly not seek for the foundation of ecclesial communion solely in the good will of humans! Such an attempt would lead to failure. We therefore understand that “being-in-Christ” normally leads to “being-with-others”. This is only one action: there is never a participating in Christ that is purely individualistic. Please take note!

Finally, to the Christian baptism is also a sign of the Kingdom and of life in the world to come. This is wonderful and encouraging; the “being-with” finally has no other *raison d’être* than “being-like.” In other words, the baptised live in the hope of an inheritance. Take note, here! Not only an inheritance announced and promised, but one which the baptised already truly enjoys, like the flower that exists potentially in the bud that is blooming. But this, on condition that one live one’s baptism daily and not consider it only as a kind of passport. The baptised therefore has in this very life the assurance of a life that opens to something. His/her present participation in the condition of the risen Christ gives the baptised the certainty of a resurrection similar to Christ’s (Rm. 6:5). This is such good news, in this period of Pentecost!

– Marie-Thérèse Nadeau, C.N.D.

“I Have Placed All my Love in You”

The main effect of every baptism is that it makes one start living with Christ. Baptism leads to Jesus. The first Christians loved to refer to this conviction by saying that they had been baptised *in the name of Jesus*. In Jesus’ name, like a letter written in someone’s name. The moment the letter is written it belongs to that person, and to no one else. We are baptised in Jesus’ name in order to believe in him and live with him. This is the baptismal confession of Christians: *Jesus Christ is Lord* (Ph. 2:11). To be baptised is to become Christ’s disciple. “Go, and make disciples of all the nations, and baptise them” (Mt. 28:19). The sign of the cross, the most excellent sign of Christ’s love, made on the forehead of the one to be baptised at the beginning of the celebration, clearly indicates the meaning of the event: today begins a long story of Jesus and his disciple, a long love story.

To discover the richness of their baptism the early Christians enjoyed considering Jesus’ own baptism, the baptism he received from John the Baptist in the waters of the Jordan River. Immediately on coming up out of the water, there took place an unexpected event. *A voice came from the heavens: “You are my beloved Son. On you my favour rests”* (Mk. 1:10-11). You are my beloved Son: these words followed Jesus throughout his life, and they became more and more his only certainty. It is also with these words that the Father would welcome him on Easter Sunday, as he gave the glory of the Son of God to the poor crucified one. At every baptism, it is the same words that the Church asks God to speak to those who are presented for baptism. You are my beloved daughter... You are my beloved son: this is the Gospel of the baptised, the first Good News that comes to them from God. See the great love the Father has shown us, to be called His children, and so we are! (1Jn. 3:1) The first Christians loved to address one another as beloved of God. Saint Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, *to the beloved of God who are in Rome* (Rm. 1:7). Being beloved of God was always for Jesus, in both the luminous and sombre days of his life, a deep certainty. And he calls his disciples to share in this certainty.

“In you my favour rests,” that is, I have placed all my love in you. Coming up out of the River Jordan, Jesus saw the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. This Spirit, this

Breath of love, always stirred in him like living water and led him to all of his nation's villages, right up to the time of his momentous trip to Jerusalem. At the end of a life of limitless love, Jesus passed on to his disciples his deep and overwhelming love. Since Pentecost, Jesus' disciples have been carried along by the great waters of his love for humankind. Like him, upon coming up out of the waters of baptism, the baptised are given a sign of the gift of the Spirit, an anointing with perfumed oil that is called holy chrism. The words then spoken to the baptised express very well the richness of this act: "God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has freed you from sin, given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and welcomed you into His holy people. You are a member of the Body of Christ. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, He now anoints you with the oil of salvation so you may live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life."

Adopted as His beloved by the Father, united to Jesus Christ, and vitalized by the Holy Spirit, the baptised journey together towards the future. They form one body, the Church. Jesus has chosen them and brought them together. It is by his hand that they welcome one another. In one action, this baptismal friendship brings them to the table of friendship, the Eucharist. The one who has been welcomed into the Church is given a place at this table. This place is his own, her own. It will always be there for him/her.

Baptism is the starting point, it is the sacrament marking the beginning of Christian life. It is a new birth, a new way of being born. Baptism is the sacrament of faith, it gives us the possibility of believing in Jesus Christ and following in his footsteps. The Holy Spirit will gradually help the baptised to know Christ and to welcome his Gospel. Baptism introduces one to a permanent covenant with Jesus Christ. It is a life-long affair: one is baptised one day, one remains baptised forever.

This is how Saint Paul spoke of baptismal life: "*All of you who have been baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with him. There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus.*" (Ga. 3:27-28). The baptised have all put on the same garment, which is Jesus Christ himself. Because of him, our differences must lose their power to divide. Baptism is the principle of equality and friendship among all the members of the Christian community. It opens one to the vast horizon of universal fellowship. The baptised are attached to Christ. Now, through his incarnation and death on the cross, Christ entered into a communion of life and destiny with all humankind. His disciples are with him in a new proximity with all the men and women on earth. Every human being is meant to be their neighbour. The grace of baptism is to be united to Christ, the Saviour of the world.

It is when celebrated at the Easter Vigil that the sacrament of baptism reveals all its richness. This is the night when Christ broke the bonds of death and came out victorious from the tomb. The Easter candle's flame shines in the darkness. The risen Christ illuminates the darkness of the world. Therefore, the baptised and those who are with them come forward to be taken up with him. If we must share a death such as his own, we are also promised a similar resurrection! With eyes fixed on the newly baptised, the Christian community shares God's dream. The community sees them as associated to Jesus

forever. It sees them forever enwrapped by the kindness and the strength of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Then, everything is communion and grace.

– Father Lucien Robitaille

A THIRD DESIRE

As we conclude Part Two, I would have a third desire:

- 3 – That those in charge of the preparation and celebration of baptism prepare a “user’s guide” listing the main points to bring out, at these meetings.

PART THREE

Testimonies to Consider

I asked some of those who had followed a session on the pastoral aspect of baptism to write a brief testimony about what baptism meant to them. “What about baptism?” To them, too, I express my grateful appreciation

for the time they took and the eagerness they showed, in responding. What follows, then, is their rich reflection.

Witnesses of Jesus

I am from a Catholic family of 13 children. I am the 11th in the family, and the 7th daughter. The family was very poor but full of affection and love. I imagine that I was not really wanted because of the number of children, but God wanted me for His child. My parents chose to have me baptised so that I would have a place for God in my heart and be a witness of Jesus. I thank the Lord for giving me the strong faith I now have, to strengthen me in times of trial. I am proud to have been baptised and to be a practising Catholic. I am always ready to receive the Lord’s kindnesses and blessings, in my daily life. The door to my heart is widely open, so that I may share my love and be open to the peace I want for those I love. I love giving and being of service to others, and taking part in the pastoral work.

– Fernande Albert

An Open Door on Hope

I am certain that my parents had only one objective, from the time of my birth: to give me the best of themselves. I have received very much. For people of their time, they had very specific values. A good education was a priority, and my parents sacrificed a lot so as to offer me instruction that many youth in my milieu could never have. However, I can affirm that the first responsible act they had at heart was that of my baptism. Living as a child of light allows one to experience wonderful things. And this was their greatest gift. I have always tried to make choices – at times quite difficult – to respond to this deep feeling of belonging to the Christian family I belong to. I am convinced that despite all my weaknesses, God welcomes me into His life. Being a Christian fills me with hope. Baptism identifies my faith in Christ. I believe that he enlightens and guides me by his Word which, to me, is truly light. My baptism was the first gift I received, the greatest one, the most meaningful, the one which makes me aware that whatever happens, I shall never be alone. In other words, for me, baptism is an open door to hope.

– Claudette Babineau

Everything is Possible

I was lucky to be raised in a Christian family, and I am most grateful for it, today. However, when I reached adulthood, I abandoned all religious practise. One cannot hurry the moment of spiritual awakening! Even God our Father leaves us free. In my case, I had to go through many trials to reach

God, my final goal. I come from God and shall return to Him. When I have come to Him and asked for His help, He reached out His hand. I had no fear of Him, I asked Him for a guide, the Holy Spirit. Everything is possible to the believer, “less difficult for the one who hopes, easier for the one who loves, and easier still for the one who perseveres in the practise of these three virtues” (Narihira). Here is how I live out my baptism in daily life: I thank God for being there for me, and I always ask Him to send me the Holy Spirit to guide me. I still make mistakes, but I am proud to be on the right path, I feel this in the deepest recesses of my heart. And we cannot go wrong when we follow our hearts.

– Léda Babineau

Committing Myself Still Further

My baptism is at the basis of my entire life as a Christian. It is, so to say, the door to the other sacraments. I would not have been able to receive any of them without first being baptised. I know that I could be saved without baptism, but I could never have been a Christian, without it. It is through baptism that we are introduced to the Church, sign of the Father’s welcome into the great family of the children of God, and disciples of Jesus Christ. Being a disciple of Jesus means partaking in his royal, prophetic, and priestly mission, and following him against all opposition, like him and in his name, in order to eventually share in his life for eternity. Through baptism you are forever a member of Jesus Christ. I have lately learned that the word “baptise” did not have an exclusively religious connotation, in the days of Jesus: it simply meant “to immerse.” It is with this meaning that in an ancient text, the term is used in reference to an old tub of a boat which its owner pulled out to sea, to sink it. It is our own old tub, our self-centred, materialistic ego that Christ asks us to abandon and sink at sea. I realise that being baptised means to die to myself so as to adopt a new life, a new model, and new values. When the Apostle Paul writes to us about putting on Christ, this is what it means to act as a baptised person. It means to see the world with new eyes, to love as he loves, to show concern for the weak and the deprived, and to live for them as he himself gave us the example. To be baptised means to be critical of one’s way of acting, it is a refusal to encourage the exploitation of workers by multinationals, just for the sake of saving a few pennies. Being baptised means encouraging fair trade. Being baptised means to take care of the poor among us without ever forgetting that they, too, are rich compared to the immense poverty of third-world countries. Many people tell me that we have our own poor to look after. When will we have to begin giving like Christ demands of us? When we no longer have a single poor person, a single handicapped person, a single sick child, a single person dying of cancer, a single illiterate person, a single sick person in our hospitals... ? We may as well say – never! During that time, and on the sidelines of our rich societies, millions of these excluded will be left without the vital minimum in food and water. What does my baptism tell me? It tells me that they are my brothers and sisters in Christ. It tells me that this injustice is unbearable, and that I must commit myself still further.

– Alfreda Bérubé

A Wonderful Gift

It is through my baptism that I am committed to my community and several committees. First, I am committed to my family that gives me love and happiness, and allows me to blossom so that I can

do my work properly. As coordinator and animator of a family-based catechetics programme for years 1 to 6, then as a volunteer in the Scout movement where I am in charge and animator of spiritual activities, as a person in charge of youth ministry, I have welcomed children and parents, and have shared my faith with them. I receive a lot, because of the family spirit where friendship, fellowship, unity and peace are created. What a wonderful gift! As one in charge of baptism preparation, I dip into the source of my own baptism in order to help others grow in their faith, by sharing and growing with them in love and faith which bind us to Jesus. As chair of the PPC and because of my participation in different activities in my parish as well as in neighbouring parishes whose people I visit – the sick, the elderly, the shut-in, the handicapped, and those who are sometimes left aside for personal reasons, with these people I share so much love and joy. They are my strength and my courage, and I thank the Lord for having set them on my path. My baptism was my parents' greatest gift to me, after the gift of life. Baptism gives me the right to eternal life and to another family, my Christian community. As a baptised person, I must celebrate in the community where I am given strength, by listening to the Word of God and sharing in the Eucharist. I am called to work with the people around me at building a solid and life-giving community that reflects the love of God. Hence, I can share, grow, and live out the mission given to me, to be priest, prophet and king. I hope with all my heart that my presence encourages others to commit themselves. I am happy and satisfied because I love my work and, despite difficulties or challenges I sometimes encounter, I know that I am not alone and that I shall be given the strength I need.

– Thérèse Boudreau

A Free Gift

My baptism is God's free gift to me, the most beautiful gift my parents gave me. It was also the occasion of my first encounter with Jesus, and my point of departure in God's great family and the Christian community. My parents were strong believers and had a great desire to stimulate my faith through getting to know, love, listen to and pray to Jesus. It was also through their example that my faith grew. Besides, I had the advantage of our living close to the church and of being in contact with very religious people; this gave me a taste for attending Mass, evening prayer, vespers, etc. I felt drawn to these religious ceremonies, despite the fact that I didn't always understand their meaning. I felt good in the presence of "Little Jesus," as I called him. As a baptised person I am called, like Jesus, to be a light to others, through the example of my everyday life. As the Letter to the Galatians says: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patient endurance, kindness, generosity, faith, mildness, and chastity" (Gal. 5:22-23).

– Alda Boulay, R.H.S.J.

For Life

At baptism it was my parents who decided that I was to receive the first sacrament. Through baptism I made my entry into the great family of the baptised. From one thing to another, I learned many things, among others, faith, love, respect, and forgiveness... many things that help us carry on despite the obstacles we come across. I associate baptism with God in me, and with the fact that I am never

alone. Finally, I would say that baptism has brought something I cannot describe, but which I am so happy to feel. He and I, together for life! What deep happiness! I often say “thank you” to life, but today I say “thank you” to “my parents” up above for having me baptised and showing me life’s true values.

– Lise Boutot

In the Great Family of Christ

Baptism is the sacrament of initiation into the Christian life, and the gate to the sacraments of the Church of Christ. To be baptised is also to join the great family of Christ which we call the Christian community. To be baptised also means to be in communion with the other members of the Christian community who form the Body of Christ. Baptism gives us the Holy Spirit to bring us directly into the life of Christ, that is, we die and are raised up with Christ, dead to sin, and raised up to new life with Christ. To be baptised is also to follow Jesus, and be his witnesses. Through baptism Jesus gives us faith and the graces needed to follow him and be his witnesses in our own milieu and with all that we are. However, to walk with Jesus and be his witnesses, we must hear about him and get to know him. This was done first of all by our parents who taught us our prayers and told us about the life of Jesus; and then we learned from the clergy and our catechists. Baptism gives us faith, hope, and love and, as baptised, I must cultivate and stimulate the growth of these precious gifts. In order to help these gifts grow, we must use every means possible, prayer, and the eucharist which gives us the Body of Christ, and his Word which gives us the graces and the power needed to live our baptism in our own milieu. Joining associations like the Cursillo Movement or a religious community like the Filles de Marie-de-l’Assomption helps us share the Good News of Christ, and this nourishes our faith. To be baptised is also to be at the service of others, to live our baptism in community, “in other words, in the great family of Christ.”

– Marius Caron

A Daily Commitment

I realise that baptism calls me to be part of the community of believers, and to follow Christ. I was immersed in Christ’s death and resurrection. However, it is evident to me that being a Christian is a daily commitment; this is very demanding, and it comprises many responsibilities for me to take up, as a baptised person. Today I must confess my faith in word and live Christ’s message in action. It is today that I must witness to his love to those I encounter, especially those who are in need. I am called upon today to live my faith with my Christian community. Today I must repeat my “yes” to follow Jesus Christ, and accept to undertake my journey with him. Today I must accept being on an ongoing journey of growth in the faith in order to contribute to the mission of Christ who came to reveal the true face of God to the world, and actualise His presence. Today, in my pastoral work and in my commitments for greater justice in the world, I hope that as a Christian I am adding my own little brick to the construction of this Kingdom of peace, justice, and love which Jesus proclaimed. Such great challenges! It takes a whole lifetime to work through these many challenges of living as a Christian.

– Ghislaine Clavet

Working at Building the Kingdom

The day of my baptism was the most important day of my life. I am now realising the grace I received, that day, when I officially became a member of the great family of God. The Spirit of Jesus I received at baptism has helped me grow in faith and love, and has given me the courage and generosity to respond to the call of religious life. If I was able to get up, after a mistake, if I was able to offer my hand to someone in need, if I have had the courage to stand fast in my faith, if I was able to forgive an injustice, it is all because of the grace I received at baptism. As a baptised person I was also called to serve others, and I thank the Lord for giving me the opportunity to do so, in my work as a catechist and pastoral agent. Through this I have the opportunity to serve those whom the Lord sets across my path, and to actively participate in the life of my Church community. At baptism the Lord also gave me the mission to work at building up a Kingdom of justice and peace. The Spirit I received at baptism gives me the courage to denounce injustice and to defend the poor. Finally, my vocation as a baptised person, to draw ever closer to Jesus and to work at making my life more like his own, is the work of a whole lifetime. What a challenge! And how lucky I am to have such a vocation!

– Jeannine Cormier, N.D.S.C.

A Divine Colouring

As I began thinking about “my baptism,” I asked myself the following question: If I weren’t baptised, would that change anything to my life? If I were not baptised I would probably feel a deep emptiness and, perhaps, much confusion. I certainly could live the human values and perhaps acts of kindness: my attitudes could reveal to others the kindness, love, and sociability worthy of a human being. If such is the case, what richness, then, does baptism in Christ give me? It is a true mystery of communion with God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. At times I can perceive something of this richness given me; at other times, the richness of this sacrament of Christ’s life in my own life escapes me. My baptism, which makes me a member of the vast family of Christ, gives to my daily actions a value of love which far surpasses my humble capacities, and assures me that I bear in me something much greater than I am as a simple human being. This sacrament allows me to participate in this world in Christ’s divine life and to hear say to me, too: “You are my child, and in you I have placed much trust and kindness.” As a member of the “visible body” of Christ which is the Church, Jesus invites me to work in his vineyard by commitments appropriate to his Gospel; in this way I also take part in building up the Kingdom. This Kingdom is made real as much in my religious community as well as in the parish and diocesan communities. Therefore, “my baptism” gives to my every action and attitudes a divine value which human nature by itself cannot achieve. The Holy Spirit, the Breath of Life, gives to my life a divine colouring that escapes me, but which I appreciate through my faith as a baptised person.

– Viola Côté, F.M.A.

The Greatest Inheritance

Since my baptism, my parents embarked on a beautiful adventure as they accepted, through this sacrament, to raise me in love and in the joy of the risen Christ. I am very grateful for this, and I

thank the Lord for my parents who taught me through their example and selflessness, to grow in faith which, to me, was the greatest inheritance I received. At the age of confirming my faith, I was very proud of what I had, and at my Profession of Faith I confidently committed myself to the One who is in me. Through baptism I developed lovingly, and passed on this beautiful gift to my children, and to those around me. I am now deeply committed in my community, and this year I took a major step in accepting the experience of working with the parents of children in grades 5 and 6. This is quite a challenge, but I trust in the Holy Spirit who is always there to guide me. In this great family of God's children I am a happy and fortunate to be in the Lord's service. In closing, I would like to quote Mother Teresa, whom I love very much: "The fruit of faith is love, the fruit of love is service, and the fruit of service is peace."

– Victoire Daigle

“Welcome into the Family!”

I was baptised by my parents because I was too tiny. My baptism is a gift I am proud of. Baptism is a first sign, a gift of the Holy Spirit who gives us the life of God, Christian life in the Church. It is a grace, a spiritual experience. I received life from God. "Welcome into the family!" The Church, community of the disciples of Jesus Christ. Baptised Christians – a common faith. The Spirit in me gives my life meaning, significance. I perceive a life that will never end. Through baptism, I belong to a community of disciples. One faith, one baptism, one service, in the following of Christ. At baptism I become a Christian and Christ gives me his life. With my baptism I have an important role to play in life, through my example. I must spread love around me.

– Berthe Desjardins

Priceless Treasure

I experienced the event of "my baptism" on the day of my birth in the deep faith of my parents who chose for me what they considered to be "the best." It was an extraordinary gift, being welcomed in the Church as the beloved of God. It was especially my parents, brothers and sisters who helped me discover in my child's heart this priceless treasure placed in me on the day of my baptism, through their witness of love, fraternity, self-denial, commitment, and prayer. It was and still is "living out" on a daily basis. This priceless treasure is God giving Himself, taking the first steps, walking ahead of me, being very close to me so that I may get ever closer to Him and, with Him, I become closer to my brothers and sisters, to reveal to them His loving face, the Good News which brings life and fills one with joy! This God has revealed Himself as infinitely kind, concerned about my happiness, making me feel secure in days of uncertainty and trial, and filling me with His graces, to replace my weakness, and giving me the boldness of trust in Him. This God revealed Himself to me as a bridegroom through the humanity of the risen Jesus Christ who invites me to share everything with him: joys, suffering, trials, successes, failures, apostolic dreams... I quickly realised that I was unable to live God's dreams in my life without the help of the Holy Spirit with his gifts which were given to me at baptism, for me to be a willing instrument in His capable hands that open new vistas, paths to a future filled with hope. Such a richness, this baptism of mine! How I wish that everyone discovered it, to enhance their happiness by leaning on this rock and working with Him, so that his Kingdom come.

– Réjeanne Fortin, S.G.M.

Sign of Tenderness

Baptism is the first sacrament I received, the first visible sign of the kindness and friendship of Jesus. As He did at Jesus' baptism, the Father says to me: "You are my beloved child, and all my favour rests in you." Jesus takes me by the hand and guides me, prays for me, and waits with patience and fidelity, because He leaves me free. He will never abandon me because I belong to him. So, I am never alone, he is at my side. Through baptism I am priest, prophet, and king: I am worth a lot, to him. Through baptism I entered into the great family of God, and I have a community that loves me and supports me. Baptism immersed me in death to sin and resurrection in the life of Christ, so as to live as much as I can as a child of light, with the help of the Spirit. The water of baptism washed me clean of original sin, and this gives me the good odour of Christ. I am very happy to have been baptised!

– Marguerite Geneau

A Shared Life

As I consider my baptism I want to thank my parents who had the faith and who were the first people responsible for getting me baptised. Baptism is not something we receive, but a life that we share, a life that should change our way of seeing things and call us to action, to surpassing oneself, and to self-surrender. Baptism immersed me in the death and resurrection of Jesus so that I may develop fully with the help of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is the centre of my life. What prompted me to join a baptism preparation and follow-up team was that one day, as I was taking a walk, the following hymn came to mind: "Father, I am your child." So I discovered my mission to become involved in baptism preparation. It is now five years that I am involved in this ministry. This is what baptism has made me, a "Priest, Prophet, and King."

– Yvette Labonté

Chosen for a Mission

I am a good person with a lot of faith, and the sacrament of baptism is very important to me. I am a child of God. As a child I was baptised to be a member of the Catholic Church. I am identified by the name "Leona," God's little girl because He chose me for a mission on this beautiful planet of ours: to love Him, believe in him, serve Him, respect Him, be generous to the poor, help my neighbour, and acknowledge him in my daily life. He counts more and more on me to make him known to others and spread his Gospel. At Mass, his eucharistic bread and wine nourish me with his presence and his love. I am a member of the choir, and a lector in church, and I love to praise him. He gave me a gift by choosing me, so that I may bear fruit, fruit that endures. For me, this is what it means to be his child and to love him eternally. I love to compose, so allow me to give you my definition of a baptised person:

- Building a strong home, filled with love of Jesus...
- Learning to love one another as he loves us...

- Sharing and tasting the good holy bread; communion...
 - Working, and listening to his word...
 - Being inspired by the Holy Spirit by inviting him every day...
 - Lovingly supporting the weaknesses and sorrows of life...
 - Being enlightened by my prayer which rises up, so that blessings and kindnesses come down...
- Léona Leblanc-Lavoie

A Treasure Chest of Seeds

Like most people of my generation, I was not aware of my baptism, but I was privileged to be born in a very practising Christian family. Besides, all of my schooling was in a boarding school where the sisters, through their teaching and example introduced us to the practice of the Christian life. I was therefore able to realise that at baptism I was given a treasure chest of small seeds capable of bearing many beautiful fruits, given a favourable environment. Love of God, attraction to prayer, interest in hearing about God and learning the catechism, the discovery at a young age of my religious vocation, are all fruits of my baptism. One of the realities that made me live and still fills me with happiness is that the Holy Trinity abides in me. I know today that I received everything at baptism, and eternity will not be long enough for me to give thanks to the Lord.

– Marie-Cécile Leclerc, S.G.M.

In the Faith of the Church

Baptism is a gift of God, and ours is the duty to live it and share it with others. This is what my parents did. Like most Catholics, my godparents brought me to be baptised when I was only a few days old. An important decision was taken for me by my parents. Since then, I have grown and accepted that decision, first at confirmation in grade one, and then at my profession of faith in grade seven. However, there is still a question regarding my understanding of these events, and their meaning. Does it mean that I did not believe, or that my faith was weak? No, but only that my faith was still growing. My parents taught me how to pray, they raised me and educated me in the faith of the Catholic Church, as best they could. I married a believer, and together we founded a family. We had children and we, too, brought them to church to be baptised. However, this time it was with the faith and trust that being saved by Christ's resurrection, it was important for us to present to God the children He gave us so that they, too, would get to know and love Him as we did. We journeyed together with different prayer groups in the Church. We were received into the Franciscan Secular Order on the feast of Christ the King. Article 4 of the Rule says that secular Franciscans apply themselves to reading the Gospels frequently, going from the Gospel to life, and from life to the Gospel. This is such a beautiful way of living one's baptism! Today I can say that my baptism is the greatest gift my parents ever gave me, and I want to live this gift of God fully, every day.

– Harvey Levesque, O.S.F.

The Road to Truth

I have no memory of my baptism because I was baptised the day after I was born. My parents told me later that I had been baptised and that I was part of the great family of Christ. I later realised that

besides giving me physical birth my parents also gave me a spiritual life: these were for me the two most beautiful and richest gifts of all. As I grew up I soon realised that not only their decision was for my good, but that this path was for me the road to truth. I also realised that alone I could not confront life, but by joining the great family of Jesus I could find the necessary support and strength to continue. Thanks to this commitment my parents made in my name, I can proudly say that I am a daughter of God and that He is there to protect me whatever happens. To me, baptism was the key and the seal giving me access to my life as a Christian. It was a covenant with Christ. Baptism committed my whole life in a new direction, that of the Gospel and of Christian education in my daily life. It was to me the first sign of God's love, and the door to the other sacraments. These have been and will always remain the tools that the Church has placed at my disposal to give me the strength needed, in order to pursue my mission with God. My baptism has helped me live a life of sharing, fellowship, and love in order to help build up a better world where it is good to live. Through others, it also introduced me to Jesus. This marked the beginning of my mission to introduce others to God by sharing with the poor and the sick and showing concern for them, encouraging them, sharing in their distress, and always being attentive to them. In other words, I can say today that I was not only baptised but that I am baptised in Jesus, and proud to be so.

– Ginette Bossé-Losier

On the Road with Christ

At my baptism God gave me the breath of life, allowing me to be part of the disciples of Christ, shedding light on the darkness in my heart, and these have had repercussions on both the psychic and the physical. My parents passed on the faith to me through baptism. Growth in the faith depends on the grace of God and acceptance of this gift through baptism. The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me. The one who follows Christ has life in abundance. Baptism is a covenant to keep and to show in one's actions and behaviour. Baptism set me on the path with Christ, since through his death and resurrection, he totally opens up every road that is blocked. I was given a new identity at baptism. Yes, I was baptised into Christ. The seed sown in me must bear the fruit it carries, like the caterpillar must become butterfly, since it is already a non-developed butterfly, a butterfly that has not achieved perfection. The transformation of my being by baptism is due to the conversion of faith, the conversion through which the baptised is joined to Jesus Christ and his Good News. As a baptised person, I acknowledge the God of Jesus Christ whom he calls "Father," and I see myself as a daughter of God. Baptism makes visible, evident and demonstrable that the human being recognises God as "Father." As a baptised person, I live this belonging to God as communion within the Church which has its history, tradition, project, and mission. And in this Church, I must be an active member.

– Stella Martin

A Life of Grace

Baptism was the key that opened to me the door to an entire life of faith – faith in a God I would never see except through the eyes of loving parents when they brought me to church to be baptised, because of their faith in God. From the very first I was immersed in their knowledge of a loving God, inherited from their own parents. I can honestly say that I became a member of the Body of Christ

through their act of faith when I was brought to church to be made a member of our Christian community. Blessed by the Holy Spirit, I was able to recognise and appreciate the privileges of a loving God through the example and teaching of loving parents. Isn't it wonderful that a small amount of water cleans not only my whole being but also allows me, if I so desire, to live a life immersed in the grace of God, and in sublime love?

– Mavis M^cCluskey, N.D.S.C.

On the Right Path

If I write the word “Baptism” with a capital B, it is because it is the greatest and most important word in every human life. From birth to death, this sacrament draws me to the Trinity, through the total Christ. This journey in the faith is as slow as the unfolding of one's life. It is first to my parents that I owe this priceless gift. However, such a treasure must develop and bear fruit, otherwise it wastes away and is lost. The actions and words of our parents set us on the right path. I had the joy of having a grandmother who had a knack for boiling things down to essentials, I admired her and she loved us. Nuns, too, helped me discover prayer and the greatness of a single mass. The Holy Spirit drew me to meditation and to trust in this God who showed Himself more and more as a Father full of kindness, and a lover of each of His children. My being drawn to God led me to seek Him and love Him all the more, and this led me to the thought of dedicating myself to Him in the religious life. I was wrapped up in His Word: “As often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me” (Mt. 25:40). I chose to serve him as a Grey Nun, a servant of the poor. With time I got to realise that I am Church with all my brothers and sisters who want to follow Christ, and that together we must always better know about him, love him, and serve him in the poor among us. The Word of God and the daily liturgy are the central points of my prayer and daily reflection. Among my apostolic activities I have the pleasure of meeting young couples for “Baptism follow-up.” I am always amazed at their openness, and the depth of their reflection. I am privileged to harvest where others have sown. When I join in the monthly celebration of baptism in my parish, it takes me back to my own baptism, and makes me discover more and more the grandeur and richness of this sacrament.

– Geneviève Michaud, S.G.M.

Nothing More Beautiful

I am glad to have been baptised in a family of Catholic believers, and regarding baptism preparation, I am very happy with what is given. Young couples who bring their children to be baptised are Catholic, but 90% of them are non-practising. This is too bad. We also have problems in meeting the godparents, because most of them are from outside our milieu. We baptise these tiny infants and then we no longer see them nor their parents and godparents. In our parish baptisms are always held the second Saturday of each month. My feeling would be that we have special days once in a while, to bring young couples together for their child's baptism preparation. For me, there is truly nothing more beautiful than an infant's baptism. I just love it!

– Jeannine Montreuil

Grace and Privilege

I view my baptism like a grace which, like all other graces, was given to me without cost. Yes, it is without cost that I was born into a Christian family, and that my parents presented me for baptism. It was also without charge that the Father who created me a child of God led me, through baptism, into the great Church founded by His Son Jesus Christ. What grace, what privilege! This welcome into the Church of Jesus Christ gives me access to the sacraments, sources of vitality to my Christian life. Since baptism I have been guided and sustained by the helping hand of the one who endured suffering and death, to lead me to life. Vatican Council II made me aware of the greatness of the baptismal event, in my life as a Christian. Like Saint Paul I could say: “Nothing can ever separate me from the love of Christ.” Baptism brought me onto the path blazed by the dead and risen Jesus, and I cannot remain silent about him. Each day I ask him to make me a true and worthy witness of the message I bring, to make him known. I am thankful for belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ, the great Christian community, to whose construction I am summoned. I sometimes try to imagine what my life would be like if I had not been baptised, if I did not hold on to the risen Jesus. I always come back to the creed of my Christian faith which incites me to surpass myself every day and to marvel at everything I have received and receive each day from God’s merciful heart. Yes, as an adult I can state that the baptism I received as a child did not stay on the church steps. Rather, it opened to me the doors of the great Church into which I entered, and about which I am proud.

– Irène Pelletier, F.M.A.

A Place among Them

On a beautiful Sunday in April, 1957, my family brought me as a newborn to the church of Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs, to be baptised. My parents had decided for me to make me a child of God. With the participation of other members of the community, the priest baptised me. To me, my baptism was God welcoming me. It made me a child of God, a brother of Jesus, and a brother to each one of the immense crowd of believers in Jesus Christ. The community called me by my name, and set a place for me. I was welcomed into the great family of God’s children. The gathering of believers, the community of the disciples of Jesus Christ welcomed me. All these people who meet regularly around the Word of God, all these people who cherish, share, and pass on the faith in Jesus Christ made room for me with them. Baptism is also welcoming the Holy Spirit. At baptism, the Spirit of God came down on me with all his graces. He grants me his timeless and transcendent mercy, and source of perpetual renewal. Baptism is the beginning of a new relationship with the Lord, a relationship of Love. He becomes present to me through my parents and my brothers and sisters in the faith. He will continue his presence to me through love, teaching, catechetical instruction, the sacraments, the community gatherings, and prayer. Baptism is also a calling. I am called by my vocation of being a child of God – like all the other baptised – to share in God’s love. It is a call to follow Christ through loving others to the point of entering into the Spirit of love between the Father and the Son. It is a vocation of love of neighbour, with Christ, in the Spirit of the infinitely good Creator, our Father. I give thanks to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for having given me such a beautiful gift, the greatest gift one can receive, the gift of baptism and faith.

– Jean-François Pelletier, seminarian

Foundation and Source

My baptism: birth to a new Life... God's life in me! How can I describe this intimacy which allows me to live with the Lord day after day? I know that he is my light on the path of life... I realised that I do not seek him out often enough. It is especially when I meet couples for their child's baptism preparation that I realise its many implications. The Lord assures me of his presence and of the strength I need to carry out those commitments I have chosen, especially my priestly ministry. Besides, baptism is the foundation and source of all the ministries exercised by the baptised, whether it be the ordained ministry or one mandated by the bishop for carrying out a function in the diocesan Church. Associated to Christ's threefold mission of priest, prophet, and king, my life becomes an offering through the gift of Christ to his Father... it acquires a new dimension, and I must understand that words spoken and actions made must correspond to his Gospel. In this way, my life becomes a real witnessing, and I can place my charisms in the service of building a better world. It is in openness to others and sharing with them that the Kingdom of God will be realised even better. I thank my parents for not hesitating to have me baptised... I thank the Providence for having grown up in a large family, it helped me better discover the Lord's invitations.

– Fr. Rino Thériault

Like a Mustard Seed

My baptism corresponds with God entering into my life. He came because my parents were believers and asked their parish priest and the Church for it. It is good to thank the Lord for those who have passed on to us this heritage of faith in Jesus Christ. I am proud of this gift of God for my whole life. However, baptism is but a seed which needs to be nourished and cared for: as we know, young plants need more care and attention. That is why I am so grateful to my parents and family for having watched over this gift of God to me. I am also happy to be called God's child and to belong to a great and beautiful family. With God's grace, I am a disciple of the Lord Jesus who has promised never to abandon me; I love the parable of the mustard seed (Mk. 4:30), as a comparison of my baptism, since the seed holds the entire genetic baggage and develops, if exposed to the right elements. Likewise with baptism, if it is nourished with God's graces, prayer, sharing, and forgiveness, it will be the springboard for me to jump into the waters of the Father's love.

– Fr. Romain Trépanier, S.M.

God's Wonderful Gift

I let Saint Gregory of Nazianzen help me with my reflection. Speaking of baptism, he says: "We call it gift, grace, anointing, illumination, clothing of incorruptibility, bath of regeneration, seal, and everything that is the most precious." "A gift, because it is given to those who bring nothing." It is such a grace to have had Christian parents who made me a child of God through baptism. What could I personally have brought in exchange, as a newborn child? "Grace, because it is given to the guilty." Thank you, Lord, for having washed away my guilt. "A bath, because sin is swallowed up in the water." Now that I can do so myself, I can say: "Wash away my guilt, O Lord my God, and cleanse me from my sin." "An anointing, because it is sacred and royal (which is what the anointed are)." I thank my godparents for having me share in this grace. "An illumination, because it is a shining light." I thank the members of the Franciscan Secular Order for helping me understand the importance of my baptism, and allowing me to profess my faith, following Saint Francis in the footsteps of Jesus. It was such a precious gift, to make me a child of God and of the Church through baptism and through profession as a secular Franciscan. "Clothes, because it covers over shame." Reconciliation is such a great grace! It allows us to clothe ourselves in the garment of our baptism.

“A bath, because it cleanses.” Such a wonderful grace! Thank you, Lord. “A seal, because it protects us, and because it is a sign of the lordship of God.” Thank you, Lord, for making me your beloved child in baptism. I also let Saint Gregory of Nazianzen close this reflection. He says: “Baptism is the most beautiful and wonderful gift of God.” What more could we say?

– Michèle Turgeon

A FOURTH DESIRE

- 4 – As we conclude Part Three of this Letter I urge you, dear brothers and sisters, to write down and share with one another in a word, a sentence, or a paragraph, what you yourselves think about your own baptism. May the testimony of all the baptised above help your reflection. And may the exhortation of Saint Leo the Great stimulate your contemplation: “Christian, become aware of your dignity. You now share in the divine nature. By baptism you have become a temple of the Holy Spirit.”

PART FOUR

Pastoral Guidelines and Directives

The intention of this chapter is to urge every member of the diocese to continue to fathom the wonder of his/her own baptism and to ensure a better baptismal preparation ministry in our diocese. Every pastoral guideline must be rooted in the Tradition that Holy Scripture and the Tradition of the Church endlessly reveal to us. The Old Testament announced a number of times the new covenant that God desires to establish with His people. We have but to read chapter 36 of the prophet Ezekiel: “I will take you away from among the nations, gather you from all the foreign lands, and bring you back to your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your hearts of stone and giving you hearts of flesh. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees. You shall be my people, and I will be your God.”

At Easter time, the Church proclaims the first Letter of Saint Peter, which many consider the

first “encyclical” on baptismal life: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart to proclaim the glorious works of the One who called you from darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were no people, but now you are God’s People; once there was no mercy for you, but now you have found mercy.”

Let us also read Saint Paul’s call to the Colossians: “Because you are God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you. Over all these virtues put on love, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect. May Christ’s peace reign in your hearts, since as members of the one body you have been called to that peace. Dedicate yourselves to thankfulness. Let the word of Christ, rich as it is, dwell in you, in wisdom made perfect, instruct and admonish one another. Sing gratefully to God from your hearts in psalms, hymns, and inspired songs.”

With this, I offer you a fifth desire:

A FIFTH DESIRE

- 5 – That every member of the diocese continue to fathom, in thanksgiving and perseverance, the wonderful richness of his/her own baptism.

The Pastoral Orientation Congress for a New Evangelisation accepted several recommendations on baptism preparation, on its celebration, and on its follow-up. These I accept as my own, as unavoidable guidelines which I would like to see carried out, in the months to come.

FIVE GUIDELINES

- 1st: That through concrete actions (such as homilies or meetings with parents for catechesis and sacramental preparation) parents be made more aware of their role in the Christian education of their children, and of the commitment they made when they asked to have their children baptised.
- 2nd: That following an inventory of what already exists, and thanks to the animation of the diocesan Commission on Family- and Parish-Based Catechetics, parishes or pastoral units look into the possibility of setting up ways of promoting the religious awakening of children 0-6 years, as follow-up to their baptism.
- 3rd: That each parish or pastoral unit have a baptismal preparation team composed of several well-prepared persons, to respond to the parents' Christian formation needs.
- 4th: That with support from the diocesan pastoral services, adequate continuing education be offered to baptismal preparation teams, to help them carry out their ministry adequately.
- 5th: That we develop in our parishes or pastoral units a 'culture of the call,' by challenging others to greater commitment in their local Christian community, in the name of their responsibilities as baptised, and of their own vocation.

It is therefore important that every parish and pastoral unit establish this year a baptism preparation team. It could perhaps at first be composed of no more than three or four people, but with time other parents and catechists could join this nucleus.

There is a sixth directive I would like to formulate, dealing with the frequency of meetings in preparation of baptismal celebrations. Taking account of all the actual changes both in our society and in the Church, it is necessary that parents and godparents be adequately prepared. However, before formulating this guideline, I invite you to read the following pastoral reflection.

Importance of Baptism Preparation

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!” (Mt. 28:19-20) This is how Matthew’s Gospel ends. We feel, however, that this is not the end but, rather, that the Church is sent out on a mission. The risen Jesus himself commissioned his disciples.

I have always considered celebrations of baptism an important part of my priestly ministry. Even if I have been a priest for over thirty years now, there never was a time in our milieu when baptism was “automatic.” I myself was baptised the day after my birth, but from the very beginning of my priestly life, baptismal ministry has always included a period of preparation for parents who seek baptism for their child. We first meet at the parents’ home, then there are collective meetings with several parents and godparents.

The Church has had to deal with many changes, these last thirty years. Several people have stopped attending Sunday Eucharist. Those “practising” are mostly older than I, and young parents are not too numerous. It is curious, though, that the great majority of parents who do not or hardly ever participate in the Sunday celebration continue to request baptism for their child. Why is this so?

In our baptism preparation sessions, I have always asked the parents, “Why do you want to have your child baptised?” There have always been many answers to this question:

- It is a custom in our family, to have our children baptised. Our parents expect it.
- We want our child to be Catholic like us.
- Even though we do not practise, we believe in God. Our child can later decide for him/herself what he/she wants to do.
- We want our child to be saved. We don’t know what could happen if he/she was not baptised.

It is important for the dialogue to begin where the parents are, and with the reasons motivating their desire to have their child baptised. Nevertheless, these parents must be led to other questions which could help them in their faith journey:

- What is baptism, really?
- What does it give a child, to be baptised?
- Why do we baptise with water?
- At a child’s baptism, to what do the parents commit themselves? And the godparents? Wasn’t God the first one to commit Himself?
- Why baptise a tiny child who will never remember his/her baptism? Wouldn’t it be better to wait until it is old enough to choose for itself, to be baptised?
- How do we talk to our child about Jesus?
- How do we teach our child to pray?
- Must we take our child to Sunday Mass? At what age?

I continue to view baptismal preparation as basic to my priestly ministry. It is a place to look at the difficult questions of faith. It has often been said that the parents are the first people responsible for their child’s faith education. However, when the social climate is less and less Christian – even in our small milieu – the parents’ role becomes all the more important. The decision to have their child baptised takes them back to their own faith.

As a priest in communion with the pastoral agents, I would so like to support all the more those young parents who not only have asked for their child to be baptised, but who journey with them in the faith, especially within the framework of family- and parish-based catechetics. I often feel very limited in the mission of passing on “a treasure we carry in an earthen container.” May they discover the face of God which Jesus has shown us.

“See what love the Father has bestowed on us in letting us be called children of God! Yet that is what we are. Dearly beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall later be has not yet come to light. We know that when it comes to light we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 Jn. 3:1-2).

– Fr. Roger Dionne, V.G.

A SIXTH GUIDELINE

6th: That there usually be two meetings with parents and, if possible, godparents, to deepen the meaning of their undertaking, and to prepare the celebration. A house visit would be a good idea.

No sacrament can be celebrated without adequate preparation. It is the responsibility of the person in charge of the parish or the pastoral unit to ensure that this preparation has been well done. The first meeting could deal with the parents’ new experience of childbirth, and with the basics of the Christian faith. The following topics could be discussed: the parents’ experience of God, their relationship with Jesus Christ, the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Church, the sacraments, and Christian behaviour. This is not meant to be a course in theology, but since the child is baptised in the faith of its parents, it is a serious duty to ensure that they understand the main elements of the Christian faith. The second meeting could discuss the sacrament of

baptism, its meaning, the rites and symbols used, and the role of the godparents. Please note that there must be godparents, and these must be Catholics who have been confirmed.

As a general rule children are baptised in the parish of the parents’ residence. If the baptism takes place in another parish, the person in charge of the parish may not proceed with the sacrament without having first received the written consent of the child’s pastor, stating that the parents have been given adequate preparation for the baptism. The reason for doing this is that it belongs to the pastor of the parish to ascertain how the child will develop in its life of faith.

A SEVENTH GUIDELINE

7th : That the rites of baptism be celebrated in dignity, so that they be better understood by the participants; that short explanations be given during the celebration, without affecting the quality of the rite; that the celebration be festive, with song and music, and that it usually take place in the midst of the gathered community.

I invite you to reflect on the teaching which Sister Denise Lamarche, C.N.D., former director of the Department of Pastoral Services of the diocese of Saint-Jean-Longueuil (Québec), has kindly shared with us.

The Life of the Baptised is Sacramental

The rites of baptism are beautiful and effective. They act upon the baptised person through the will of God. They are not magical rites, however, nor do they affect the freedom of the human being who must always listen and respond to the Lord's promptings. The sacrament acts throughout the duration of human life, whatever its length, and the life of the baptised person is sacramental.

Sealed with the Sign of the Cross

The first rite, which consists in making the sign of the cross on the candidate to baptism, expresses how, throughout his or her life, the Christian is a bearer of the great love of Christ. The cross is the sign of our salvation, and we must give thanks to Christ for having loved us to the point of laying down his life for each and everyone of us, and for all humankind. Though it may be a sign given to us, the sign of the cross is also a sign that we ourselves must make. It always remains a pledge of love received and given. We are entirely marked with the sign of the cross: on our ears, that we may hear God speaking to us; on our eyes, that we may see God's glory shining in the beauty of the world; on our lips, that we may answer God who speaks to us; on our hearts, that Christ may dwell in us through faith; and on our shoulders, that we may bear our cross with Christ, in the hope of everlasting happiness. In the baptism of small children, we mark only on the forehead, but the meaning remains the same as for the adults where the complete rite is more eloquent. We must carry the cross, sign of our salvation, in our body.

For the rite to speak to us, we must see the cross, and we must give it a place in our lives. It is important that the parents have a cross in the home, where it can be seen by the children who will learn that it is a sign of Jesus. It is also important to make a sign of the cross on the child's forehead along with a prayer or a wish, for example at bedtime before the child falls asleep. In this way, even before being old enough to go to school, the child can be taught to make the sign of the cross like its mom and dad. One day, as it sees a cross on a church building or on a wall, the child will be able to identify it with the person of Jesus.

Renouncing Evil, to Follow Christ

The rite of baptism always has the renunciation of evil, renouncing to refuse to give a place to God and to prayer, in our life; renouncing injustice, violence, cheating, everything that causes harm to our neighbour; renouncing the ending of our own lives: all of this means saying no to evil and becoming a disciple of Christ who “passed among us doing good” (Acts, 10:38).

At baptism, we renounce evil in order to follow Christ, to live like Jesus. It is not enough to proclaim our faith in a ritual way while being immersed in the baptismal water. We must live as believers throughout our existence.

The ministry given to Christian parents, to teach their children about Jesus, is beautiful and important. It is a great ministry given them, to help their children believe in God who loves them, to share with others, and to forgive. In doing so, parents continue giving birth to their children, they show them the path to happiness, and they share in the action of the Church that must continue to make Christ present in the world today.

Being Immersed in the Death of Christ

A young couple asking to have their first-born child baptised said: “We know very well that in giving life to our child, we condemn it to death. This is our tragedy. So we want our child to be immersed in the death of Jesus, so that it may rise again with him and live forever.”

This is such a beautiful understanding of the water ritual, the essential rite of every baptism. The same Greek word translates both *immerse* and *baptise*. It is in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit that baptism is given. It is then in receiving themselves as sons and daughters of the Father that parents direct their children to the God they acknowledge as Father of all mankind. It is also in accepting like Christ to surrender their lives for others and especially their own children, that with them they gradually enter into the death and resurrection of the glorious Crucified One. It is also in trusting the Holy Spirit who hovers over them as over the primeval chaos, as he did over Mary at the Annunciation, and over the Apostles on Pentecost, that the parents make something new and become donors of spiritual and Christian life, for their children.

Being Anointed

If baptism introduces one into the Church, the great family of our God, it also sends out into the world those who have received it. It is always that way: Christians gather together as Church in order to be dispersed into the heart of the city. The rite of anointing with holy chrism – composed of olive oil and balm – symbolises how the baptised are mandated to spread the good odour of Christ around them. “The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favour from the Lord” (Lk. 4:18).

The function reserved to the *baptismal priesthood* is, in effect, the celebration of hope through rites. Christian parents who pray and celebrate with their children make easier for them the learning of this *priesthood of all the baptised*. The role of *prophets* is to pass on stories to faith. Parents who tell their children stories from sacred history, and tales from the Gospels help them internalise these stories which in them become the word of God. The task of the *king* is to promote regulations for

the establishment of justice and charity, for the welfare of all. Parents who teach their children to make their world more beautiful and people happier follow in the wake of those who have taken on this service of promoting justice and charity.

Bearing the Light

Christ is the light of the world (Jn. 8:12). This is what the paschal candle reminds us of. At baptism, light taken from this candle and given to the baptised or its parents or godparents, brings out beautifully the new Christian's future of being a bearer of light. This is his/her mission.

The child already has this power of calling on its parents to reach beyond themselves, to give freely, to forgive, and to love. At a time when the child can hardly do no more than let him/herself be loved, he/she obliges his/her parents to develop numerous aptitudes to give him/her all the care he/she needs, and to give him/her proper education. As for the parents, they will have to teach their child year after year the attitudes and behaviours needed to have a quality personal and family life, live in a calm and courteous milieu, and develop value-producing relationships of equality, in Church and world.

Sharing in the Life of the Church

Through baptism the child is not only the son or daughter of its parents. Like them and with them it becomes a member of the Church in which it must be helped to discover and take its rightful place.

The real mission of Christian parents consists in living their married and parental life in such a way that they preside over the life of the Church cell which is their family. This mission also consists in educating their children so that they grow in the faith, live a life consonant with the Gospel call, be always more concerned with spreading peace, justice, harmony, and happiness, and discover the path to prayer and celebration of the Lord who is always present to human life.

A Ministry

I have not hesitated to use the word *ministry* in talking about the mission given to Christian parents. To exercise a ministry is, in fact, to carry out a task attached to a function. It means to render an important, long-lasting service, and to bring to fruition a responsibility one is charged with for the good of others. The task of Christian education is attached to the parental function. And the service which the parents render to their children is long-lasting. Besides, it is not only for their children's greater good, but also for their whole family, for the Church and the world, that Christian parents carry out their mission as best they can. We thank them for this, and we pray that they find collaborators to help them in the task of Christian education, so that there be a follow-up to their own baptism and that of their children.

– Denise Lamarche, C.N.D.

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults can serve as a precious tool for baptism preparation and follow-up. Some of the actions can also become the core of a baptismal homily: the giving of a new

name, the presentation of the Gospels, the election, the recitation of the profession of faith, the presentation of the Lord's Prayer, etc. The Pastoral Notes of the Ritual are very well done. Let me quote you Note 236 [French Ritual]: "After the celebration of the sacraments of Christian initiation, the entire community and the newly baptised meditate the Gospel, share in the Eucharist, and exercise charity in order to progress to a greater understanding and application in their own lives of the paschal mystery." In order to bring back to every celebration of baptism the honour, esteem, and richness it deserves as a gift from God, it is important to return periodically to certain elements of this covenant, either at the beginning of a celebration or in an appropriate homily.

Conclusion

As we come to the end of this pastoral letter on the baptismal call, I want to adapt a prayer from one of the final prayers suggested for the baptism of children; "May almighty God who has given us new life in water and the Holy Spirit bless all the faithful of our diocesan Church. May they always be living members of His holy people, through Christ our Lord." And I am glad to share with you a song for baptism, which I composed as a sign of mission commitment.

*O beloved of God, be everywhere a true disciple of Christ,
Since our Saviour, the Word of the Father, challenges you today
To consecrate our world.*

*O beloved of God, be everywhere a witness to peace,
Since our Saviour, the Risen One, delivers you today,
To liberate the world.*

*O beloved of God, be everywhere a Gospel of love,
Since our Saviour, the Father's Messiah, comes to you today,
To rejoice our world.*

*O beloved of God, become everywhere true salt of the earth,
Since our Saviour, the Truth of the Father, raises you today,
To give taste to this world.*

*O beloved of God, be everywhere leaven in the dough,
Since our Saviour, the Way to the Father, incorporates you today,
To transform our world.*

*O beloved of God, be everywhere a light to the world,
Since our Saviour, Messenger of the Father, illuminates you today,
To be light to the world.*

A Daily Reminder

My Dear Friends,

My coat of arms and those of the diocese remind us of the place of the Blessed Trinity in our lives. It is in its name that we were baptised: in the name of the Father, the Creator, and of the Son, the Redeemer, and of the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier.

The coats of arms also evoke the great volume of the baptismal waters into which we were immersed, into the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. May the Virgin Mary, who was the witness of God's love to herself and the world, fill you with her greatest blessings.

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston