

Remembering Our Baptism

Some time ago, perhaps a very long time ago for some of us, our parents and godparents brought us to the Church to be baptized. For most reading this, we have no personal memory of this celebration, for we were babes. But, what we do have is the gift of ritual remembrance, where the past and the present “coalesce into a single intensive experience of now.”ⁱ This is what this baptismal remembrance is: a “pointer that fastens our attention across time and space, and even logic...(so that) the connective tissue to the event being memorialized attends us wherever we go, deepening our sense of what matters and committing ourselves to the lessons that flow from it.”ⁱⁱ

For your consideration as you prepare to remember your baptism:

1. You may wish to include some music to begin this ritual or to end it. Older hymns like “Shall We Gather at the River?” are appropriate if this is being done with candidates seeking full communion, for many will know this hymn. You may wish to call on the Holy Spirit by using a Taizé refrain like “Veni Sancte Spiritus.” A search engine can provide you with these songs, some even accompanied by video. And of course, musicians add a special touch!
2. Having photographs or video of participants’ baptisms will enhance this celebration. Display the photos on white and gold cloth, with votive candles. Share video of baptisms at the conclusion of the remembrance and listen to the stories.
3. Using visual images of various types of water will enhance this remembrance if it is being done in a group. Even a single image projected for a time so that participants might contemplate water’s power can add to this remembrance.
4. If this remembrance is being done alone or in a very small group, each member may benefit from bringing a journal or being given paper and a writing utensil.
5. Having Holy Water for the blessing adds to this remembrance. Even a small amount of blessed water added to a larger bowl blesses all of the water. Keep in mind if you use Holy Water, it is properly disposed of by pouring it into the earth or down a sacrarium.
6. Scented oil. Sacred chrism is generally scented with balsam. To recall this, you may wish to use a balsam scented candle to create the familiar fragrance in the anointing of chrism by a priest or Bishop.
7. Baptismal garments: This remembrance is deepened if participants actually bring baptismal garments. If that is not possible, the photos of baptisms can stimulate the memories and stories.
8. A white pillar candle and tapers for each individual, along with matches or a lighter will bring life to the final remembrance if this is being done in a larger group. A single votive candle will add depth to an individual’s remembrance.
9. This remembrance can be spread out over several gatherings, and repeated on the actual dates of baptisms and during the Easter season, when the whole Church renews her baptismal promises.

Leader: We begin this remembrance the way the Catholic baptismal liturgy begins, by greeting one another by **name**. (Greet one another by name, learn names) Now that we are done speaking one another's names in greeting (and if you are doing this alone, speak your name aloud), recall:

Reader: The baptismal ritual begins with this question: By what name shall we know this child of God? Why? For God knows each of us by name, as individual beloved creatures.

"For you created my inmost being;
You knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Your works are wonderful,
I know full well." Psalm 130:13-14

Why? Because our names identify us as beloved of God, called by name, and our names are the means by which we will take our place within the family of God.

Leader: Let us prepare now to sign ourselves with the sign of the cross, remembering that we belong to Jesus Christ. Let us recall that it was upon the faith of our parents and godparents, who, after the priest, signed us with the sign of the cross that claimed us for Jesus Christ, that we are here today. Let us give thanks for their faith, and let us renew our commitment to belonging to Christ and his Church using this ancient Trinitarian prayer. "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

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If there are candidates preparing for full communion with the Church, this is an appropriate place in the ritual remembrance to ask them to remember aloud what it was like to have their senses signed with the cross when they were welcomed into this faith journey toward full communion.

Leader: When Jesus was baptized, St. Luke tells us that the Spirit appeared in the bodily form of a dove and descended upon Jesus accompanied by a voice saying, "This is my beloved son; with Him I am well pleased."ⁱⁱⁱ If you are a parent yourself, remember how you felt, looking down upon the faces of your children, wrapped in those white garments. Feel again the tenderness, the absolute belovedness and that fearsome notion that you would in fact lay down your life for them. Your parents felt that for you, too. That's a reflection of God's very own heart; a heart that God intends to continue to share in the Holy Spirit. Hear the Lord assure us:

Reader: "The Lord appeared from afar: 'I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with loving devotion.'^{iv}

Leader: *(If you have an image or images of water, this is where to share them.)* Water: sign of life, power of death. Water: serene, stormy, crashing, rushing. Water: cleansing, soothing, slaking. Water: shallow, deep, tidal, glacial. Water: necessity of life. And you were brought to the waters of baptism:

sign of death to turning away from God, death to everything that separates you from God. The waters of baptism: sign of life, cleansed from sin, freed from Evil's grasp, claimed as God's own child.

The water with which we were all baptized is called "holy" ...and that is because it holds within it the powerful story of God's love for God's people: Noah and the flood, parting the Red Sea, miraculous water flowing from a rock...the River Jordan's water washing over Jesus. This is no ordinary water, for in it the past and present meet, and create in us a new future.

Reader: Let us remember in prayer: Father, you give us grace through sacramental signs, which tell us of the wonders of your unseen power. In baptism, you use your gift of water, which you have made a rich symbol of the grace you give us in this sacrament. Father, look now with love upon your Church gathered here, and unseal for us the memories of the font of baptism. By the power of the Holy Spirit, awaken the memories of your cleansing and our rising to a new birth of innocence. Help each of us to remember that we were buried with Christ in the death of baptism so that we might rise with him to newness of life.^v Through Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen.

Leader: We remembered being claimed for Christ by the priest and our parents and godparents. Now we remember whose we are: Jesus' disciples, followers, those taking up our crosses to follow Him. We remember, this time with water and the sign of the cross.

Ritual Action: Each person remembering marks themselves with the sign of the cross again, this time using water. (Pass the water if the group is small. Process to it if the group is large. In either case, be slow and deliberate. Music might be part of this, either accompanying the blessing or afterwards to embed the memory. The song "Baptized in Water" might work. Again, YouTube can help.)

Leader: Oil, holy chrism. Oil that seals, oil that soothes, oil for anointing...for being set apart for a special mission. Listen to the mission:

Reader: The promised strength of the Holy Spirit will make you more like Christ and help you to be witnesses to his suffering, death, and resurrection. It will strengthen you to be active members of the Church and to build up the Body of Christ in faith and love.^{vi}

Leader-Storytelling: Share stories of Confirmation and the entire ritual action of prayer, laying on of hands and anointing. Continue to share with one another times you have needed the gifts of the Spirit as you've undertaken to be Christ for the world: wisdom, understanding, right judgment, courage, knowledge, reverence and wonder and awe in God's presence.

Ritual action to accompany the storytelling: Allow the fragrance of a balsam candle to enhance the remembering of the grace of the sacraments, where the real presence of Christ infuses our senses and sends us forth, anointed for mission.

When the storytelling is complete, or as an individual you have completed journaling about the need for and use of the Holy Spirit's gifts, and on your own Confirmation and the power of anointing, introduce the next symbol of baptism: the white garment.

Leader: Many of us came to our baptismal celebration already clothed in white garments. For some of us, those garments hold family history. (Ask if there's a story like that to share.)

Reader: The image of clothing shows up a number of times in the Bible, often used as an outer reflection of people's inner states. Reflecting on the state of the people of Israel, the Book of the Prophet Isaiah says, "All our good deeds are like polluted rags."^{vii} St. Paul told the Galatians, "All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."^{viii}

Leader: And so the baptismal garment signifies this clothing with Christ. Did you ever wonder why baptismal garments are white? (Conversation possible here.)

It is because in the early Church, white was the color associated with teachers and rulers (scholars and members of the Senate or as the baptismal ritual says, priests and kings). Baptismal garments are white because they proclaim joy and purity and truth, but white also proclaims that from this point forward, the person wearing the white garment commits their life totally to God, (clothes themselves in Christ, as St. Paul said) and is willing to suffer as they witness to Christ in lives of daily service. The identity of priest, prophet and king will be lived daily as followers of Christ wash one another's feet. White proclaims all of those roles.^{ix}

Response: Silent reflection, with the photos or garments and their meaning.

Leader: Finally, we come to the final symbol...a flame of faith, to be kept burning brightly. The flame was given to our parents and godparents to be kept burning brightly. Lit from the Paschal Candle, it is the sign of Christ's Light piercing the darkness, a flame divided but never dimmed.

Reader: When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Leader begins the ritual action: Leader lights a white pillar candle. Each person lights a taper from the pillar candle and remains standing. If there are large numbers of people, the light should be passed one to another. If this remembrance is being done alone, the individual prayerfully lights the candle, reflecting on the power of a single flame to bring sight, safety and a sense of closeness.

Leader: Friends, when we were baptized, this light was entrusted to our parents and godparents to be kept burning brightly. We are here because the light of faith passed from them to us is still burning in each of us. Let us pause to give thanks and praise to God for them.

We are reminded that the collective brightness of our light pierces the darkness and can bring Jesus to a dark world: in hope, in warmth, in education, in food, clothing, shelter and medical care. We can bring light by companioning the sick, instructing one another, burying the dead...listening to one another, praying for peace.

Reader: Jesus tells us: “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they set it on a lampstand, and it gives light to everyone in the household.” (Matthew 5:14-15)

Leader: This is what our baptism proclaims: that we are the light, light shared with others, to dispel the darkness of the world by rejecting evil and working for justice. May we walk always as children of the Light, keeping the flame of faith burning brightly until we go out, with all the angels and saints, to meet the Risen Lord.

For this we pray, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. + Amen.

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ⁱ For a lovely treatment of this notion of *anamnesis* or, of what the Hebrew people call *zekher*, see Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, PhD. “9/11: Remembering How We Remembered.” <https://blog.lawrenceahoffman.com/tag/do-this-in-remembrance-of-me/> Accessed 11/29/18

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 3:11

^{iv} Jeremiah 31:3

^v Adapted from the Prayer Over the Water during the Easter Vigil. See RCIA #222.

^{vi} Adapted from RCIA #233

^{vii} Isaiah 64:5

^{viii} Galatians 3:27

^{ix} Rev. Gareth Leyshon. “The Colour of Martyrdom.” Homily at St. Philip Evans. Holy Thursday, 2018. <https://catholicpreacher.wordpress.com/2018/03/28/the-colour-of-martyrdom/> and Thomas J, Craughwell “So, what do the colors mean?” Our Sunday Visitor Newsweekly. 9/23/2007. <https://www.osv.com/OSVNewsweekly/ByIssue/Article/TabId/735/ArtMID/13636/ArticleID/8899/So-what-do-the-colors-mean.aspx> Accessed 11/29/18.