

UNIT TWO: HOW WE CELEBRATE

LESSON 3: BAPTISM: The Gateway to Life

CONTENTS OF LESSON:

1. Baptism is the 'gateway to life in the Spirit'. The word means 'to plunge or immerse'. A person is immersed into water three times. This signifies death and new life.
Death: We are cleansed from sin (Original and personal). However, we are still weak and must keep fighting temptation to sin. [CCC 1213-14; 1239-40; 1262-64]
Life: We become a new creation, temples of the Holy Spirit, children of God, part of the Body of Christ and joint heirs with him. [CCC 1265, 1267]
2. We can see elements of our own Baptism through the ages:
 - i. Creation: When the world was created, the 'Spirit of God' swept over the waters. At our baptism a prayer is made asking God to send the Spirit upon the water of baptism. [CCC 1218, 1238]
 - ii. Crossing of the Red Sea: The Israelites were finally freed from a life of slavery by crossing the sea. We too are freed from slavery to sin. [CCC 1221]
 - iii. Jesus' Baptism: Jesus himself was baptized in the Jordan River. This showed that he was taking the place of sinners: that he would die (immersion) and rise to life again (coming out). We see the Spirit coming down as a dove and hear the Father calling Jesus his 'Beloved Son'. At our baptism we receive the Holy Spirit and become children of the Father. [CCC 1224, 1241, 1243]
 - iv. Pentecost: From the day of Pentecost on, the Church has baptized those who hear the Word, repent and believe. We too are converted by hearing God's Word, repenting and believing. [CCC 1236-37]
3. Baptism is necessary for salvation, as Jesus himself affirms. He gave his apostles the mission to baptize 'all nations'. However, 'God himself is not bound by his sacraments' and can save those who are ignorant of the Gospel, yet seek the truth and obey God as best they can. [CCC 1257-61]
4. Faith is important in baptism. Faith grows with the help of a believing community (especially parents) and by hearing God's Word. [CCC 1236, 1253-55]
5. *Jesus has already died and risen for us. He has made the way for us. Now he asks each of us to keep going: to grow in our faith by remaining connected with our Church family and by reading his Word regularly. With the help of God we will reach heaven safely.*



REFERENCES: Gen1:2; Ex14:21-22; Mt3:13-17; 28:19-20; Jn 3:5, Acts 2:37-38; Rom 6:11-12; 8:15-17; 1Cor5:17; 6:19; 12:13

MATERIALS NEEDED: Handouts; Lyrics of song for each student; Bibles; video clip and equipment for screening: Maureen McGovern "The Morning After" from The Poseidon Adventure 1973. (Available on YouTube. Time: 2.2mins. Select the one with the scenes from the movie.)

NB. If the students are not receiving Religious Education in a Catholic School, they would get a deeper insight into Baptism from lessons 8 and 9 of 'Jesus and the New Covenant' (Unit 2.)

I. STARTER:

- Today we will begin our class with a song from the box-office hit, 'Poseidon Adventure'. The story was inspired by an actual event. On New Year's Day when everyone is celebrating on board a luxury liner, a tidal wave hits the ship and it tips over. Water fills the ship and many people die. The movie is about the few who keep searching for a way out of the watery grave and who finally are rescued. The theme song was also a big hit. Let's listen and watch.

[Play the video once.]

- Let's listen to the song once more. This time ask yourself: Is this song connected to my life in any way? Could it be connected to Jesus' life? Pick out any words or phrases that are meaningful to you.

[Give out the lyrics of the song and play it again. Get the students' responses and bring out:]

- We too are on a journey which could be scary at times.
- We are also looking for life and safety.
- Beyond the storm and darkness there is light and peace: Heaven is waiting for us.
- The last verse expresses hope. ('I know we'll be there by tomorrow')
- We need help to reach heaven ('Why don't we cross the bridge together')
- We also need to keep trying. ('if we can hold on through the night')
- Jesus went through the whole experience of death to life before us. It was so that he could make a way for us and take us safely through life.

II. DEVELOPMENT:

- Jesus symbolically showed what he was going to do for us by a certain action. We learnt about it last year. What was this action? [*He accepted baptism. He was immersed in the Jordan River.*]
- Baptism was meant for sinners, to show their repentance and cleansing. Jesus was not a sinner, yet he went through the action of baptism. Why? [*He was taking our place.*]
He was saying, "I will die (immersion) and rise again (coming out) for you." About three years later this did happen. He suffered, died and rose again.
- What about us? Do we have to do anything to reach life? ... Our part is to follow Jesus in this immersion. We too have to die to ourselves and rise to life. God gave us a way to do this in a symbolic way, which is our baptism.

[Give out handouts. Students look up the Bible references and attempt to fill in the missing words at the bottom of the page:]

How does 'DEATH' happen in baptism?

1. We are cleansed from sin. This means that all sins are forgiven: Original and personal sins.
Original sin is the sin we 'inherited' from our first parents. Just as diseases can be passed on from parent to child (E.g. Heart trouble) the spiritual disease of sin is passed on to us. We are all born with original sin. This is removed at baptism. Personal sin means the sin that we ourselves have committed.
2. We must keep dying to sin. Even though our sins are forgiven, we still have a weakness in us. We are tempted to sin. This means we have to struggle and keep fighting temptation.

Let's look at what 'LIFE' means in baptism:

3. We become a new creation.
4. We become temples of the Holy Spirit. (That means he lives in us.)
5. We become children of God and joint heirs with Christ. As an heir inherits his father's wealth, now that we are in Christ we too inherit his kingdom.
6. We become part of the Body of Christ.

[Look at the left-hand side of the handout and fill in the answers. Students look up the Bible references and read them aloud. They suggest answers to the question: What hints of our baptism can you find in the Bible passages. Bring out:]

1. Genesis 1:2: When the world was created, the Spirit of God (some Bibles say 'wind of God') moved over the water. At our baptism too, a prayer is made asking God to send the Spirit upon the water and make it holy.
2. Exodus 14:21-22: The crossing of the Red Sea marked freedom from pharaoh and a life of slavery. For us, baptism sets us free from slavery to sin, and death that comes from it.
3. Matthew 3:13-17: Like Jesus, we too are immersed (nowadays pouring water is more common). We too are filled with the Holy Spirit and become children of God. (The Spirit descended in the form of a dove and the Father called Jesus his Beloved Son.)

4. Acts 2:37-38: As the people heard Peter’s preaching, their hearts were converted. Peter told them to repent and be baptized. The word of God has to touch and change us and lead us to repentance.
- Let’s look at a question that many people ask today: Is baptism necessary for a person to be saved and to go to heaven? Connected to that is another question: If it is needed, then what happens to all those who are not baptized? Let’s think about this in groups and discuss it.

[Students read the Bible verses and quotes and discuss in their groups before reporting. Bring out:]

1. Yes. We believe that baptism is necessary, because Jesus himself said so and asked the disciples to go and baptize people all over the world. Baptism is a way of saying to God, ‘Yes. I believe in you, and accept your gift of salvation.’ God gives us this way of saying yes because he wants us to choose him freely.
 2. However there are those who didn’t hear the good news of Jesus, or really understand. There are some who die as babies, or were preparing for baptism but died before. God has given the Church the understanding that sacraments are the gateway to heaven. But God himself has the power to do what he wants. He looks at the heart of each one and in his mercy, can make another gateway to heaven if he chooses to. This is the meaning of the quote ‘*God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.*’
- The last questions are: ‘Is faith needed for Baptism?’ And ‘How do we get it?’
[Students suggest answers. Bring out:] Faith is necessary for Baptism, but faith has to keep growing. This happens with the help of a believing community, especially the parents. Faith also comes when we hear the Word of God. (Remember what happened at Pentecost: After the people heard Peter’s preaching, they began to believe in Jesus.)

III. INTERIORISATION/PRAYER:

- As we listen to the song again, imagine Jesus is saying these words to you. He has already plunged into death and come out alive. He has made the way for you.

Now he’s telling you: “Keep going! Stay with my Body, the Church! You can’t do it alone. Keep reading my Word. This will help you believe. Heaven is waiting for you. It is the morning after the dark night, the place that is safe and warm. Come, let’s cross the bridge together!”

[Play the music again WITHOUT THE IMAGES, while the students close their eyes (or look at the words) and try to meditate. They could write their response to Jesus’ invitation on the back of their handouts.]

HOME ASSIGNMENT: ⇨ Read the handout.