

Celebrant's Guides: Infant Baptism



Practical Elements of the Rite of Baptism

This document works through the natural sequence of events in a liturgy of Baptism. It is based on the *Rite for ONE Child OUTSIDE Mass*; refer to the rubrics in the ritual book for details of including a number of children. Braces indicate adaptations when Baptism takes place {WITHIN Mass}.

Keep in mind that the ideal Baptism Liturgy takes place at four distinct and symbolic 'stations': at the Church entrance (door), around the Word of God (ambo), the Baptism itself (font) and in the midst of the worshipping community (altar). In practice, the location of the font and the main entrance often make this difficult: we want the key ritual events to be visible and audible to the whole congregation. Sight lines and sound systems may be more important in communicating the message today than the symbolism of using the 'right locations', so there may need to be a compromise. Even if all four stages take place with the family in or near the sanctuary, it is important to punctuate the service by making these stages distinct in some way.

Baptisms in Lent should be discouraged if it is possible for the child to be baptised in Eastertide – the Vigil or Easter Day Masses are particularly appropriate; but baptism should not be delayed if the child is sickly.

This document does not consider the use of music in the Liturgy of Baptism, which is covered [elsewhere](#); but the liturgy planning sheet below does include space to note musical choices. You may also find useful material through the index of liturgical resources for [pregnancy, childbirth and miscarriage](#).

[Credits & References](#)

BEFORE THE FORMAL BEGINNING

You will need

Font or vessel – spotlessly clean
Water in font – warmed if need be
Lectionary or other dignified source for readings ready on ambo – with desired text clearly marked, e.g. using a post-it note!
Copies of the Intercessions for the Reader and Celebrant
Oil of Catechumens & Chrism
Appropriate vestments (white or gold)
Paschal candle lit near font, where celebrant can touch it and flame can be reached
Spare personal candle [presentation box?] & white garment (just in case)
Towel to dry hands; means to cleanse oily fingers
The NAME of the child on a smudgeproof card at the font!
A certificate of baptism (it may be more effective to deliver this on a follow-up visit)

Check what booklets the congregation have.
ANNOUNCE page numbers as needed.
NB Children love helping to give out books!
Reminders about mobile phones, photography?
Explain to the congregation that the service can be understood as a ‘journey to God’.

Meet the family, ensure they know where things are starting.
Know who has the candle and the white garment
Be ready to direct the family to the right actions whenever they seem ‘lost’ – the celebrant usually has to be his own ‘MC’ at baptisms!

Celebrant could sing

Blessing over the water (rite A)
Final Blessing

RECEPTION OF THE CHILD

MEET the baptismal party at DOOR or OTHER SUITABLE PLACE – a hymn may be sung while the celebrant goes thus. (If the congregation is small and the narthex large enough, the whole congregation could gather in the narthex, ready to follow the child into the church.)

Greet: Parents & Godparents, whole assembly, non-Catholics

Welcoming remarks ad lib (AUDIBILITY? VISIBILITY?) & Dialogue

Child is spoken to by the priest and signed with cross by parents (+Godparents?).

Invite all to go to places to listen to Word. If appropriate, indicate that the child may be taken out, but parents & godparents should remain.

Hymn while people go to places?

{If the Baptism is at a Mass which takes a *Gloria*, this is now said or sung.}

The celebrant goes to the Chair, unless he is to read the reading which follows immediately, in which case he goes directly to the Ambo.

{Collect of the Mass, or, when permitted, Collect A or B from Baptismal rite.}

LITURGY OF THE WORD & PREPARATORY RITES

Homilette to introduce liturgy of the Word?

Reading(s) – possibly more than one Gospel; possibly including responsorial psalm. Alleluia is not required before the Gospel! Congregation may remain seated, even for Gospel.

Homily

Period of silent prayer

Hymn? {but never at Mass; and at Mass Creed is also omitted}

“Let us stand and pray...” (and adapt “brothers & sisters” if need be)
Prayer of the Faithful (note alternatives nn 241-246)

Redemptorist book uses prayer at n128 and uses “Lord Hear us” throughout – note Red Book has omitted the last intercession from the rite for One Child Outside Mass.

Homilette to introduce Litany of Saints, Exorcism, Oil of Catechumens.
Could possibly use any of these:

- ▶ It’s olive oil blessed by the Bishop – and what a catechumen is.
- ▶ Oil protects.
- ▶ Close to the heart?
- ▶ Exorcism not scary but glorious, not Manichean; Christ wins over darkness.
- ▶ “We’re backing a winner”?
- ▶ Original sin? Child is human, share in our attraction to sin and what is less good; we set their face towards light.

Ask parents and child to be in suitable place to be prayed for with Litany and exorcism. Celebrant moves to a suitable place for this also.

Litany of Saints: Minimally Mary, JBap, Joseph, P&P, All Holy... [Sung?]

Prayer of exorcism – only form A is in the Redemptorist Book

Anointing with the oil of catechumens.

Invite child and baptismal party to approach the font, others to stand or sit for the most comfortable view (remember children in congregation who can’t see well). (AUDIBILITY? VISIBILITY?) A hymn may be sung during this motion.

CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM

Arrange the baptismal party appropriately around the font. Celebrant needs to be seen (by congregation as well as the baptismal party) to be praying over the water and able to touch its surface with his RIGHT hand (even if he is left handed).

Homilette about God's use of water to sanctify; may use words in book, B is what's in Redemptorist booklet.

Unblessed water is blessed with rite A (which may be sung), or B (with a variable response) or C (fixed response "Blessed be God", which is in Redemptorist booklet).

For water already blessed, there are two rites with fixed response "Blessed be God", B is in Redemptorist booklet.

Rejection of sin – rite A is short and is in Redemptorist booklet; B is longer.

Profession of faith – only one form is given (Q&A Apostles' Creed) but other forms are permitted, including a congregational song which expresses faith. Note HONS 558 as a possible sung response.

In practice, it may be more prudent to allow the whole congregation to respond to the questions. In any case, the following "This is our faith..." must be a victorious confident proclamation. This may be a moment to comment on why we don't wait until a child is grown, but we nurture it in faith because we want the very best for our beloved children.

Formal question of whether to baptise child – make this a climax – that N **SHOULD** be Baptised...

Quietly instruct members of the baptismal party on what to do – it's better for a parent to hold child for pouring, or to take the child after priest immerses it; though a Godparent might according to custom. Also a godparent may stand by to dry the child.

The Baptism takes place.

Some form of acclamation from the congregation? (nn247-249 or song? NB Laudate 396; or the same Alleluia used for the Gospel can be effective here) [after EACH bap when more than one!]

The child is now "spotless and clean" but beware homiletic implication that the child was ever "dirty"!

Four explanatory rites follow (Ephphetha is optional in E&W, compulsory in Scot & Ire; celebrant should be able to touch paschal candle)

- ▶ Chrism [link to Charism – God's freely given gifts protect us. Note that Chrism is used for bishops, priests, altars, sconces, confirmations and coronations – always for unrepeatable rites!]
- ▶ White garment [what the baby is, what we are called to be eschatologically; could make a link with alb or funeral pall]
- ▶ Candle (lit from paschal candle by parent or godparent) [Homilette BEFORE lighting, to minimise dripping wax time! Tell the story of the Easter candle –

brought into darkness – many lights lit from the one – whole church filled with light – held up for the world; do you know your birthday – what about your baptism day? Suggest a custom of keeping it with the candle. If a breeze blows it out, you can rekindle light of faith. Cup the flame – protection! Beauty of living light...]

- Ephphetha [According to Crichton, the Bishops have decreed that this rite MUST be explained if it is used.]

The baptismal party are invited to gather before the altar; one of them carries the candle.

Hymn for procession to altar? [Again, alleluias or acclamations can be used here.] {At Mass, the baptismal party take their seats and may extinguish the candle. Note adaptations in EP I, introduction to Lord's Prayer, and Prayer after Communion.}

CONCLUDING RITE

Standing “in front” of the altar (whose front?) a homilette about how the child will call God Father and share the Eucharistic banquet. Can use words in book or ad lib.

The Lord's Prayer (be sensitive to Protestants present)

One of four possible rites of blessing:

A: mother/father with wife/all is in Redemptorist booklet

B: child/parents/all [“Mums come first, as usual!” comment]

C: mother/father/all

D: does not mention parents

Forms A & C may be altered in the case of single parents (n190).

Dismissal

A hymn of thanksgiving and Easter joy; or the Magnificat

If customary, the child may be taken to a shrine of Our Lady.

Don't forget to enter the detail in the Baptismal Register!

Remember to issue a baptismal certificate if desired.

Liturgical Planner & Checklist

<i>Processional music?</i>	
Where to meet child?	
Welcoming comments	
Dialogue: Both parents?	
Who signs child?	
<i>Music? {Gloria?}</i>	
1 st Reading reference	
1 st Reader	
Psalm reference	
Cantor?	
Gospel Acclamation	
Cantor?	
Gospel reference	
Homily points	
<i>Hymn? {Not at Mass}</i>	
Special intentions?	
Response?	
Prayer Reader?	
Special saints?	
Sung Litany?	
<i>Hymn? (move to font)</i>	
Who holds baby?	
Who dries baby?	
<i>Acclamation of baptism?</i>	
Who brings garment?	
Who lights candle?	
<i>Hymn? { > prep gifts}</i>	
Which blessing form?	
<i>Thanksgiving hymn?</i>	

Possible themes for homilies & homilettes:

Welcome into the Church – images of building, of body, living stones, gates of heaven, “the doors are open” (if they are!)

The NAME – link to a Saint; identity of this individual. The saints care for us, we join them in Baptism. Name-saints of the family members, godparents...

Continuity of TOUCH right back to Jesus!

Death is significant because of life; develop death imagery.

Light – many candle themes – see notes in the Explanatory Rites.

Role of parents as teachers of their children, by word and example.