



In 2011 I was asked to be the godfather at my niece Ava's baptism. I was more than happy to take on this responsibility, and I felt honored to be a part of her entrance into the Catholic Church. I have many good memories from the Baptismal Mass and the celebration that followed, and I occasionally think about how I can carry out my duties as godfather despite being "an ocean apart" from Ava.

During this last semester of studies in Rome, I took a course on the Sacraments of Christian Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. This was a great opportunity to renew my awareness of the supernatural gifts we receive in Baptism. To tell the truth, I didn't learn very many new things during the course, but remembering all the things that I already knew and putting all the pieces of the puzzle together once again helped me to call to mind that Baptism really is a crucial moment in our lives, one that we should never forget.

A couple questions might come to mind when we think of Baptism. Why is it that we baptize anyways? Is it just a sort of nice ritual that took root over the ages? And what really happens in Baptism that makes it supposedly so special?

The reason why we receive the sacrament of baptism can be found in Sacred Scriptures. Jesus himself wished to receive the gift of the Spirit in Baptism before he started out on his public ministry, and he was baptized by his cousin John the Baptist. But above all, Jesus expressed his desire that all men be baptized in the command that he gave his disciples before ascending into heaven: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). So Baptism is not just a nice ritual that the apostles or someone else came up with, but rather a response to a very specific desire of Christ.

And what really happens when we are Baptized? I mean, what's so special about getting water poured over your forehead? When the priest or deacon, the ordinary ministers of the sacrament of Baptism, pours water over our foreheads while pronouncing the words of the baptismal formula – "I baptize you, (name), in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit – the newly baptized gets access to a

whole new spiritual universe. In Baptism, considered to be the door to the rest of the sacraments, we are freed from the power of Satan, our sins are forgiven, we become adoptive children of God, we are incorporated into the body of Christ (the Church), and we receive new life. That's quite a bit of spiritual power packed into one brief moment!

In Baptism we receive the gift of grace for the first time: God himself comes to make his abode in our soul. And we also receive an indelible mark called "character" by which we are "configured to Christ", meaning that we belong to Him and we are now disposed to participate in Christian worship. And no sin can erase this mark!

Studying the Sacraments of Christian Initiation once again helped me to renew my awareness of the greatness of what I received in my own baptism. Every year I try to remember to celebrate my own baptismal anniversary by setting aside a special time of prayer on that day to thank God for such a special gift. We rarely forget to celebrate our birthdays: but what about the day when we were born spiritually? Do you know which day you were baptized on? That might be a good challenge to take on: do some research, find out your own baptismal anniversary, and make a note on your calendar along with a reminder to celebrate it in some special way.