



Our Catholic Life

A READING AND STUDY GUIDE FOR ADULT FAITH FORMATION

5
✦ SACRAMENTS ✦

LIVING THE SACRAMENTS

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How to use this study guide in seven small-group sessions

Gather. As people arrive for each session, welcome them warmly and offer them refreshments. You may wish to have sacred music playing to set the tone. If people are new to each other, name tags can help break the ice. When everyone has arrived, gather your group and invite them to open their books to today's material.

Begin with *Lectio divina* prayer. Each session opens with a short and prayerful reflection on a scriptural text that is found in that section of the *Catechism*. Here are the steps:

1. Begin with the Sign of the Cross.
2. Read aloud the Introduction for this session.
3. Call everyone to prayer using these or similar words: *Let us turn our hearts to Christ now and hear the word of the Lord.*
4. Invite a member of the group to proclaim the Scripture we present for you.
5. Invite your group members to share about the text, first in twos and threes if you wish, and then as a whole group. Sharing: *What word or phrase in this reading catches your ear? What is God saying to us in this scriptural text?*

6. Now pray in these or similar words:

O God, we know that you are with us and that you behold all we are about to do. Now grant that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we might be faithful as we study our faith and charitable in how we treat each other. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Read. Moving around the circle in your group and rotating readers, read aloud each numbered faith statement. Group members should note items in the material that strike them as especially important. Do not read aloud the **We Believe** statements. They are provided as an enhancement to the text.

Group or personal process. When you come to the process notes, pause to continue around the circle, discussing as the notes direct. Use our suggestions as a starting point, and add your own questions, prayers, or action plans.

Finish. As you conclude this session, call everyone to prayer once again. Reread the scriptural text we used in the beginning. Then move around the circle one last time to share: *In light of this reading and what we have learned today, what has touched you most deeply? What new insight of faith will you carry away from here? What new questions about faith have arisen for you? How will today's discussion work its way into your daily life?* Close your session with the prayer we provide, or lead a spontaneous prayer in which everyone shares their own prayer.



Session One

BAPTISM

BASED ON ARTICLES 1212–1274 OF THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. TO READ A SUMMARY OF THIS SECTION, SEE CATECHISM ARTICLES 1275–1284

Introduction

We kick off our study of the sacraments in the place where it all begins: baptism. We speak of it as “initiation,” and it is accomplished in three sacraments together: baptism, which is the beginning of new life; confirmation, which is its strengthening; and the Eucharist, which nourishes the disciple with Christ’s body and blood and leads to transformation in Christ. The essential rite of baptism consists in immersing the candidate in water, or pouring water on his or her head, while pronouncing the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Those who die for the faith, those who are catechumens, and all those who, without knowing of the Church but acting under the inspiration of grace, seek God sincerely and strive to fulfill God’s will can be saved even if they have not been baptized. Since the earliest times, baptism has been administered to children because it is a grace and a gift of God that does not presuppose any human merit; children are baptized in the faith of the Church.

Scripture

READER: A reading from the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (ROMANS 6:1-5)

READER: The word of the Lord.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

PART ONE ✦ ARTICLES 1212-1228 OF THE CATECHISM

Initiation

[1] We Catholics celebrate three sacraments in order to become fully initiated into the People of God, the Church. The first of these is baptism, where we are born anew. The second is confirmation, which strengthens us. The third is Eucharist, which gives us the food of eternal life and continues throughout our lives.

[2] We are, in a sense, never fully initiated but always entering more deeply into the mystery of the Church and into life in Christ.

[3] In this session, we are learning about the first of these, baptism.

The term comes to us from a Greek word which means, literally, to plunge or immerse. Going into the water is a symbol of entry into Christ's death, and coming out of it a "new person" is a symbol of the resurrection.

[4] In the early Church, it was also called "the water of rebirth" or "the washing of rebirth," as we see in the Letter to Titus, chapter 3, verse 5. It has also been called "enlightenment" because by it, we enter the community in which grace and light are received and shared. Indeed, through baptism we ourselves become light for the world.

[5] The baptismal water is blessed on Holy Saturday night during the Easter Vigil. Our prayer that night reveals our understanding of baptism. We believe that grace comes to us through the sacramental signs and that this grace reveals God's unseen powers.

WE BELIEVE

Baptism is birth into new life in Christ. It is a sacrament of initiation into the community of the Church who has Christ as her head.

[6] We believe that water in baptism is this rich symbol. We believe that the Spirit breathes upon these waters, making them a wellspring of love. The crossing of the Red Sea by Israel in the story of the exodus from Egypt was itself a great symbol: enter into the water on one side and leave it a new people on the other.

[7] Jesus himself began his ministry by being baptized in the River Jordan and later sent his followers to baptize as well. "Go," he told them after the resurrection (in Matthew, chapter 28, verse 19). "Go...and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit..."