

Re-visioning a Rite of Affirmation of Baptism for the Sunday Eucharist

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© March 2002

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Introduction

The inclusion in the Sunday eucharistic liturgy of a brief rite of baptismal reminder or baptismal affirmation is a significant achievement of the post-Vatican II Roman Catholic liturgy. The present Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling Holy Water (*Ordo ad faciendam et aspergendum aquam benedictam*), however, needs to be improved; it is not as good as it should be. (See the separate document, *Rite of Blessing and Sprinkling Holy Water: Analysis and Critique*.)

Here I offer for study and discussion what I believe to be an improved, alternative rite of baptismal affirmation. It is intended to be a model and a resource, to be adapted as seems appropriate. This rite of baptismal affirmation may also be used outside the Sunday eucharistic liturgy, on a variety of occasions.

It is assumed here that this re-visioned Affirmation of Baptism will be an integral part of the Introductory Rites of the Eucharist, as Blessing and Sprinkling Holy Water now is in the U.S. edition of the Sacramentary (but not in some other editions; see the above-mentioned Analysis and Critique for variants on this point.) In any case it is appropriate to look first at the Introductory Rites as a whole.

The Introductory Rites

The 1975 edition of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal states,

The parts preceding the liturgy of the word, namely, the entrance song, greeting, penitential rite, *Kyrie, Gloria*, and opening prayer or collect, have the character of a beginning, introduction, and preparation.

The purpose of these rites is that the faithful coming together take on the form of a community and prepare themselves to listen to God's word and celebrate the eucharist properly. (n.24)

In addition to these points, it seems appropriate to say that the Introductory Rites are statements of self-identity on the part of the worshipping assembly. That is, they say who (collectively) it is who has gathered for worship. The individual elements of the Introductory Rites provide distinct answers to the question of identity. For example, the sign of the cross identifies us as believers in a Triune God, as those called here by this God, and as those who turn away from all other gods. The I Confess identifies us (individually and collectively) as sinners – but redeemed and forgiven sinners. It also says that we care for and pray for one another. The opening song and Glory to God identifies us as people of song and therefore of joy and hope. The opening prayer says that we are people of prayer.

The highly participatory nature of the Introductory Rites communicates further that the people who have gathered for worship are active, not passive; that we are participants, not spectators; that we engage in dialogue, not monologue; and that we pray in a variety of ways, not just one.

In this context, then, it is not only appropriate that the baptismal identity of the assembly be referred to; it would seem to be essential. In my view a Rite of Baptismal Affirmation should be included in the Introductory Rites as often as is the I Confess (though the use of each may also vary in different liturgical seasons).

Criteria

The first step in the present re-visioning process involved discerning some general characteristics of any new Rite of Baptismal Affirmation. These include the following.

1. Like other elements of the Introductory Rites, it should be brief, simple, not require paper, be highly participatory, and take the character of dialogue.
2. It should not only speak about baptism but also be a model of baptismal identity. Thus it should not only include action (sprinkling water) but also, again, a high degree of participation.

3. It should avoid being a prayer of confession, and petition will not be its primary element. An orientation toward thanksgiving, praise and blessing seems most appropriate.

4. In content the rite should speak about baptism and baptismal identity and use the language of contemporary theology. It should also refer to the experience of baptismal living (and not just an abstract theology of baptism) and use contemporary, accessible language.

5. It seems preferable for this rite to be different than the baptismal renewal rites that are used on other occasions. Thus I distinguish between “renewal” and “affirmation” for this purpose. Baptism and the baptismal experience of the Holy Spirit are referred to not as past events; rather they are considered to be present realities in our lives.

Description of the Rite

The re-visioned Rite of Baptismal Affirmation that has taken shape may be outlined as follows.

(Water is present in a suitable vessel.)

Opening verse, which is repeated by all.

Prayer of baptismal affirmation, with multiple responses.

Sprinkling with water

Concluding verse, identical to the opening verse, and which is repeated by all.

The rite may now be considered in greater detail.

Water: Water may be prepared in a suitable vessel ahead of time. Alternatively, water may be poured from a pitcher into a vessel either immediately prior to the opening verse or immediately after this verse.

Opening verse: The opening verse makes a statement about baptism, e.g., “Blessed be God, who calls us by name.” Six texts are given, any of which may be used at any time. A further text, “Christ is risen, alleluia,” may be used during the Easter season.

This verse is considered to be a diaconal, not a presidential text; thus it may be proclaimed by a deacon, cantor or another minister.

As it is repeated immediately by the assembly it need not be previously memorized and it need not be printed in any form. This method of proclaiming the verse is also an experience of participation.

The opening verse is both a beginning of this rite and an invitation to the people to enter into it. This is done, not in a period of silent prayer as in the present rite, but aloud in repeating the verse.

Prayer of baptismal affirmation: This prayer is spoken by the presider, though of course in the name of the entire assembly.

Seven alternative texts of this prayer are offered here. Five follow one pattern, while the other two each follows a slightly different pattern.

All of the texts are divided into three sections, each of which concludes with the assembly's response, "Thanks be to God" (or some other suitable response). This makes it easier for people to grasp each text as it is spoken, and provides additional opportunity for vocal participation.

No textual cue is given for the response; this will be signaled by the vocal inflection of the presider.

Sprinkling with water: Following the prayer of baptismal affirmation, a minister sprinkles the assembly with water.

This is considered to a diaconal, not a presidential, task. I suggest it be done by pairs of young people (or other lay people) - one to carry a vessel of water and the other to sprinkle. For a large assembly the water might be divided into two or more vessels, to be used by several pairs of ministers.

During the sprinkling an appropriate song or verse may be sung.

Concluding verse: After the sprinkling, the same verse used at the beginning is again proclaimed, and again repeated by the assembly.

This is the conclusion of the rite; the assembly then moves on to the Glory to God or opening prayer.

Theology

A number of affirmations are made regarding baptism: In baptism:
your [that is, God's] Holy Spirit comes upon us
we share in the death and resurrection of Christ
we are incorporated into Christ's holy church
we enter into the wisdom of Christ
we are bound to each other in the community of your covenant
we are joined to Christ's ministry of love, peace and justice
we enter deeply into your friendship
we are delivered from slavery to sin and death
we are freed to walk according to the Spirit
we are enabled to proclaim the wisdom of Christ's gospel
we are enabled to continue his ministry of peace, justice and reconciliation
you give us the grace of adoption
you make us inheritors with Christ of your promised realm
we take our place in the household of wisdom, the church

we are cleansed from sin
we are given new life
we are promised the reconciliation of all things in Christ
we are called to transform church and society
we are called to liberate others and honor the dignity of all

These affirmations are considered to be statements of praise of God.

These texts are primarily prayers of thanksgiving, blessing and praise. God is named and blessed in ways that relate to baptism. We give thanks for God's gift of water, which we use to affirm our baptism. The prayers are trinitarian, and the role of the Holy Spirit is important.

The prayers include petitions that ask that we be empowered to live out our baptismal identity and carry out our baptismal ministry, for example:

to build up Christ's Body, the church
to manifest Christ's love for all persons
to continue Christ's ministry of gentleness and compassion
to know Christ in the breaking of the bread
to have the wisdom to see the needs of the world.

Alternative Official Texts

Other texts that might be used for a rite of baptismal affirmation, and which are far superior to those found in the present Blessing and Sprinkling Holy Water, may be found in the Book of Blessings (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1989), pp 521-522. They may also be found in the separate document, "Blessing and Sprinkling Holy Water: Analysis and Critique."

Model Rites of Baptismal Affirmation

Responses by the people are indented.

A list of potential initial and concluding verses is found at the end. Any of these may be used with any prayer. Assignments given here are arbitrary.

A

We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy people.

We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy people.

O God, you are the fountain of life.
In baptism your Holy Spirit comes upon us
like morning dew upon the grass
and like spring showers upon the thirsty soil.
Thanks be to God.

In baptism your Holy Spirit comes upon us
like cleansing water upon the body
and like ocean waves upon the shore.
Thanks be to God.

We give thanks for your blessings
in all of creation and all of history,
and for Jesus Christ, your Word and your Wisdom.
Thanks be to God

Water is sprinkled upon the assembly.

We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy people.
We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy people

B

Blessed be God, who chose us in Christ.

Blessed be God, who chose us in Christ.

O God,

we bless you for the waters of Jesus' baptism.

In them he was anointed as Christ by the Holy Spirit

that he might renew all of creation

and open to us the joy and freedom of everlasting life.

Thanks be to God.

We bless you for the water and blood

that flowed from Christ's side as he hung upon the cross;

in them he gave birth to his sisters and brothers.

Thanks be to God.

We thank you for this gift of water,

which we use to affirm our baptism.

May your Holy Spirit empower us

to preach good news to the poor,

proclaim release to the captives,

and set at liberty those who are oppressed.

Thanks be to God.

Water is sprinkled upon the assembly.

Blessed be God, who chose us in Christ.

Blessed be God, who chose us in Christ.

C

We have put on Christ, in him we have been baptized.

We have put on Christ, in him we have been baptized.

God of life and creativity,
we give you thanks for this gift of water,
which we use to affirm our baptism.

In baptism we share in the death and resurrection of Christ
and are incorporated into Christ's holy church.

Thanks be to God.

In baptism we enter into the wisdom of Christ,
whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light,
who is gentle and humble of heart.

Thanks be to God.

May your Holy Spirit enable us
to build up Christ's Body, the church.

Thanks be to God.

Water is sprinkled upon the assembly.

We have put on Christ, in him we have been baptized.

We have put on Christ, in him we have been baptized.

D

Blessed be God, who calls us by name.

Blessed be God, who calls us by name.

God of refreshment and compassion,
we give you thanks for this gift of water,
which we use to affirm our baptism.

In baptism we are bound to each other in the community of your covenant
and joined to Christ's ministry of love, peace and justice.

Thanks be to God.

In baptism we enter deeply into your friendship;
you are the wisdom of the cosmos,
giving freedom and new life.

Thanks be to God.

May your Holy Spirit move us
to manifest Christ's love for all persons.

Thanks be to God.

Water is sprinkled upon the assembly.

Blessed be God, who calls us by name.

Blessed be God, who calls us by name.

E

We are reborn in Christ by faith.

We are reborn in Christ by faith.

God of strength and energy,
we give you thanks for this gift of water,
which we use to affirm our baptism.

In baptism we are delivered from slavery to sin and death,
and freed to walk according to the Spirit.

Thanks be to God.

In baptism we are enabled to proclaim the wisdom of Christ's gospel
and continue his ministry of peace, justice and reconciliation.

Thanks be to God.

May your Holy Spirit empower us
to continue Christ's ministry of gentleness and compassion.

Thanks be to God.

Water is sprinkled upon the assembly.

We are reborn in Christ by faith.

We are reborn in Christ by faith.

F

We are God's work of art, created in Jesus the Christ
We are God's work of art, created in Jesus the Christ.

God of wonder and delight,
we give you thanks for this gift of water,
which we use to affirm our baptism.
In baptism you give us the grace of adoption
and make us inheritors with Christ of your promised realm.
Thanks be to God.

In baptism we take our place in the church, the household of wisdom,
where there is no longer slave or free, male or female,
for all are one in Jesus Christ.
Thanks be to God.

May your Holy Spirit enlighten us
to know Christ in the breaking of the bread
Thanks be to God.

Water is sprinkled upon the assembly.

We are God's work of art, created in Jesus the Christ.
We are God's work of art, created in Jesus the Christ.

G

Blessed be God, who chose us in Christ.
Blessed be God, who chose us in Christ.

God of care and hospitality,
we give you thanks for this gift of water,
which we use to affirm our baptism.
In baptism we are cleansed from sin, given new life,
and promised the reconciliation of all things in Christ.
Thanks be to God.

In baptism we are called to transform church and society,
liberate others and honor the dignity of all.
Thanks be to God.

May your Holy Spirit give us wisdom
to see the needs of the world.
Thanks be to God.

Water is sprinkled upon the assembly.

Blessed be God, who chose us in Christ.

Blessed be God, who chose us in Christ.

Alternative Verses

Any of these verses may be used with any prayer of affirmation.

We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy people.

Blessed be God, who chose us in Christ.

We are God's work of art, created in Jesus the Christ.

We have put on Christ, in him we have been baptized.

Blessed be God, who calls us by name.

We are reborn in Christ by faith.

Christ is risen, alleluia. (during the Easter season).