

The Origin and Foundation of Christian Baptism is Jesus

The Sacraments of Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist—are the foundations of the Christian life. “Baptism, the Eucharist, and the sacrament of Confirmation together constitute the ‘sacraments of Christian initiation,’ whose unity must be safeguarded” (CCC, no. 1285). We begin with our study of Baptism in this chapter and will treat the other two Sacraments in the following ones.

Baptism is birth into the new life in Christ. In accordance with the Lord’s will, it is necessary for salvation, as is the Church herself, which we enter by Baptism.—
CCC, no. 1277

In his dialogue with Nicodemus, Jesus taught that Baptism was necessary for salvation. “No one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit” (Jn 3:5). After his Resurrection, Jesus met with the eleven Apostles and gave them the commission to preach the Gospel and baptize, telling them, “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mk 16:16). The word *baptism* in its origins is Greek and means “immersion” and “bath.” Immersion in water is a sign of death, and emersion out of the water means new life. To bathe in water is also to undergo cleansing. St. Paul sums up this truth when he says, “You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col 2:12).



The origin and foundation of Christian Baptism is Jesus. Before starting his public ministry, Jesus submitted himself to the baptism given by John the Baptist. The waters did not purify him; he cleansed the waters. “He comes to sanctify the Jordan for our sake . . . to begin a new creation through the Spirit and water” (St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Liturgy of the Hours*, I, 634). Jesus’ immersion in the water is a sign for all human beings of the need to die to themselves to do God’s will. Jesus did not need to be baptized because he was totally faithful to the will of his Father and free from sin. However, he wanted to show his solidarity with human beings in order to reconcile them to the Father. By commanding his disciples to baptize all nations, he established the means by which people would die to sin—Original and actual—and begin to live a new life with God.



A Culture of Compassion Starts with Prayer

The Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, marks the traditional end to the Christmas season. Witnessing the suffering in the world around us, we know that many did not have a carefree, merry Christmas season.

This Christmas Eve Mass, one song, “O, Holy Night,” particularly stood out to me:

*Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Til He appear'd and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.*

The world is broken. There is suffering. And God Himself comes into that suffering to be with us. This is the true nature of compassion – to suffer **with**. But awareness of the broken-hearted and God’s great gift of Himself could easily become just another insight that comes and goes. So in the New Year, how do we carry the message of Christmas in our hearts? How do we live its truth in our lives, rather than pack it away with the ornaments?

We are called to love one another as Christ has loved us, to enter compassionately into the suffering of others, and to share Jesus’ love with them. One important way we can do this is through prayer.

A specific invitation to prayer surrounds January 22, when our nation will mark the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision that made abortion legal in the U.S. throughout the nine months of pregnancy.

Since that tragic decision, more than 56 million children’s lives have been lost to abortion, and many women and men experience – often in silence – deep suffering due to their involvement.

The US Catholic bishops are inviting the faithful to participate in *9 Days for Life*, a novena for the protection of human life taking place January 21-29, 2020. Each day’s intention is accompanied by a short reflection and suggested actions to help build a culture of life.

Visit 9daysforlife.com to sign up for daily prayers sent by email or text message, or to download the free mobile app. The novena is also available to print.

The daily intention will also be posted on social media with the hashtag [#9daysforlife](https://twitter.com/9daysforlife). Follow @uscceb on Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

As we begin the New Year, let us remember the brokenhearted and the suffering in our prayers and, remembering Christ’s own love for each of us, reach out to be with others in support and in love. Though we may not see the immediate effects of our prayers and good works, we can trust in God’s power to work through us.

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