

## Q What does Baptism do for us?

**A** “Christian, remember your dignity,” St. Leo the Great said in a Christmas sermon, “and now that you share in God’s own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition” (*Sermo 1 in Nativitate Domini*, Office of Readings for Christmas Day). St. Peter said it another way: “You are ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own’ . . . . Once you were ‘no people’/ but now you are God’s people;/ you ‘had not received mercy’/ but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9–10).

**W**hat is it that confers such great dignity, that makes nobodies into God’s people—priests, royalty, sharers in God’s own nature? It is the Sacrament of Baptism.

Through Baptism, we participate in the dying and rising of Christ and become a new creation, adopted children of God. Baptism changes us. In fact, Baptism changes everything. It is as momentous as death and birth: in Baptism, we die with Christ, and we are born again as God’s beloved children.

We are incorporated into the Body of Christ, uniting us with other Christian believers, and pointing us towards a life of Christian witness, lived in community. Baptism washes away all sin, original and personal, and frees us to live according to the new commandment of love: to love and serve God and neighbor in this life, and to prepare for eternal life. Baptism marks a decisive shift in our lives. In the Rite of Baptism, we explicitly reject Satan and the power of evil, and we turn towards God, professing our faith in the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and promising to walk by the light of Christ.

In the Rite of Baptism, the priest or deacon prays: “As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as members of his body” (*Rite of Baptism for Children*). By our Baptism, we are called to be like



Christ—to act as “priests, prophets, and kings” in the world. It sounds impossible. But what does a priest do? He intercedes with God on behalf of the community. That is what we do as members of the priesthood of the baptized—we offer worship to God, and intercede for the whole world in our prayer. What do prophets do? They speak out, proclaiming God’s will for the world. We do the same when our faith motivates us to act on behalf of the oppressed and to live our lives in a way that shows others what the Gospel means. And what is the task of kings and queens? They are chosen by God to serve. In Baptism, we are chosen and anointed to follow Christ’s example of servant leadership, to lead by washing one another’s feet.

Baptism brings with it both immense privileges and immense responsibilities. We are to gather for prayer on Sundays and holy days, to join the community of believers in praise and worship. We are called to celebrate the sacraments, especially the sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood—the Eucharist, our great prayer of thanksgiving. We are called to know and to live according to the Law of God. And that is only the beginning. For every Christian, the work of living out our Baptism will look a little different, because each of us has a unique vocation—God calls everyone in a different way. One thing is certain: Baptism changes us and makes immense demands on us. It is a sacrament to be received at a moment in time, yes—but it is also a sacrament to be lived over a lifetime.

Christian, remember your dignity!

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