

THE SACRAMENTS.

THE SACRAMENTS IN GENERAL. - BAPTISM

The Sacrament in General.

- 1.** The sacraments are sacred outward signs, instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ for producing grace in our sanctifying us.
- 2.** We say that the Sacraments are *outward signs*, because they symbolise or represent outwardly the invisible grace which we receive in them.
- 3.** There are seven Sacraments, viz., Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders and Matrimony.
- 4.** The Sacraments sanctify us in one of two ways, either by making us pass out of the death of sin into the life of grace or by increasing the sanctifying grace that is already within us.
- 5.** Those Sacraments which bring us out of the death of sin to enter into the life of grace are Baptism and Penance, whence their special designation of the *Sacraments of the Dead*.
- 6.** Those Sacraments which increase the sanctifying grace already within us are Confirmation, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders and Matrimony. Hence they are spoken of as the *Sacraments of the Living*.
- 7.** By virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ and of their institution by Him the Sacraments are of themselves effective in producing grace, and this they never fail to do, provided they are received with the proper dispositions.
- 8.** To receive any Sacrament unworthily is to commit a sacrilege: it is profaning what is sacred.
- 9.** Neither Baptism nor Confirmation nor Holy Orders can be administered to any one more than once, the reason being that all three Sacraments impart to the soul a character that nothing can ever efface.

10. By this we mean that these Sacraments stamp upon the soul a spiritual and invisible mark that distinguishes it from all other souls not so favoured and in a special manner consecrates it to God.

Baptism.

11. Baptism is a Sacrament which washes out the stain of original sin and makes us Christians and children of God and of the Church.

12. And it washes away also all past actual sins when it is received (with the proper dispositions of course) after the age of reason has been attained.

13. Hence, on the birth of a child, it is incumbent on the parents to present it for baptism as soon as possible, for every day's delay exposes the child to the risk of dying unbaptised and consequently of being for ever excluded from Paradise.

14. Whenever the timely administration of baptism has not been possible, the place of the Sacrament can be taken (1) by martyrdom, which has hence been termed the *baptism of blood*, or (2) by perfect contrition joined to the desire of baptism (baptism of desire).

15. The administration of baptism belongs to the province of the bishop and of the simple priest, but when death is imminent and a priest is not available, any lay person may and should baptise, and the baptism is valid, even if the person is not a Catholic or even a Christian.

16. In this case natural water should be poured upon the head of the person to be baptised as the following formula of words is pronounced: *I baptise thee in the name of Father and the Son and of the Holy Ghost.*

17. In baptism we promise to obey the commandments of God and of the Church and to renounce the devil and all his pomp and works.

Explanation of the Plate.

18. The baptism of Christ (*see central picture*) brings out clearly the effects which the Sacrament produces. While Our Lord was being

baptised by St. John the Baptist in the waters of the Jordan, the voice of God the Father was heard saying: « This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. » (*Matt. III, 17.*) *At the same time the heavens opened and the Holy Ghost descended in the form of a dove. So too at our baptism God adopts us as His children, the Holy Ghost descends upon us, and we become the heirs of the kingdom of heaven.*

19. *The lower picture* represents the baptism of a child. The white robe which the angel is holding ready for the child about to be baptised, symbolises the fact that the soul of the child will, as the immediate effect of baptism, be at once arrayed in grace and innocence as in a beautiful robe, rendering it pleasing and acceptable to the Almighty.

20. A child dying immediately it has been baptised goes straight to heaven - *see the small picture on the right*, where the soul of the child is shown as being carried up to heaven by angels.

21. On the other hand, *in the corresponding picture opposite*, we see the soul of an unbaptised child, which has died on its way to being baptised, escaping to some unknown region where it will for ever be deprived of celestial bliss. So absolutely necessary for salvation is the Sacrament that even innocent infants cannot enter heaven unless bearing its seal.
