

The Sacraments in the Life of the Church

Every sacramental celebration is an encounter with Christ.

Nihil Obstat

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HOW CANDIDATES UNDERSTAND THE LESSON

Most Catholic middle-school aged youth do not remember their Baptism, since it likely happened when they were infants. They have probably seen a few Baptisms, and they might have been told something about their own Baptism, but the promises made on that day were promises their parents made on their behalf.

Baptism and Identity

Middle school is an important time of life for identity formation. Candidates this age are thinking about who they are and what kind of adults they might be. This provides the catechist with a natural opportunity to point out the link between Baptism and our identity as sons and daughters of God.

Abstract Reasoning

Fortunately, young people this age have a better grasp of theological language that makes them more able to see connections between the Baptismal promises and their everyday lives. Make this connection explicit through conversations about the choices we make and the inheritance we share as faithful disciples.

Reflection for Catechists

In the Sacrament of Baptism, God invites us into the Paschal Mystery of his Son, Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus died, was buried, and rose again, we die to our old selves, are buried in the baptismal waters, and rise again to new life. Through Baptism, we receive the “spirit of adoption” (Romans 8:15), and we become brothers and sisters, with God as our Father.

Baptism also frees us from sin. We are cleansed of Original Sin, the sin committed by our first parents, and its effect on all of humanity. Those who are baptized after the age of reason (usually around age 7) are also forgiven of any personal sins.

Through Baptism, we receive *sanctifying grace*, God’s Divine Life within us that makes us his friends and adopted sons and daughters, and *actual grace*, which is the help God gives us to do a particular good act or to avoid evil and grow in holiness.

We have great dignity as God’s children created in his image and likeness. The grace given to us in the Sacrament of Baptism provides us an opportunity to be all that God made us to be.

- What does it mean to be a child of God and a member of his Church?
- How can I personally renew my baptismal commitment to follow Jesus?

Scripture Background



The Scripture story used in this unit is the Gospel of Matthew’s account of The Great Commission, Jesus’ commissioning of his Apostles before his Ascension into Heaven. The Gospels according to Matthew and Mark feature an account of this event, while the Gospel of Luke highlights a conversation between Jesus and the Apostles in which he refers to the work they will do (see Luke 24:47). In these passages, we can see the foundation of the Church’s work of evangelization—handing on the Good News of Jesus to others. We can also see the emphasis on Baptism as the initial response to the Christian message and the beginning of life in Christ.

Later in the Discover section, a passage from Saint Paul’s Letter to the Galatians (see 3:26–29) is featured. This text emphasizes the unity and equality we share as baptized members of the Church. At the time of Paul’s writing, the understanding that Gentiles could also be People of God was still new. Paul emphasizes the relationship between God’s covenant with Abraham and the Baptism of the New Covenant, saying that all who are baptized become “Abraham’s descendant, heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29).

Objectives

- To reflect on the joy and peace we can experience in the presence of God
- To introduce the key themes of the unit and to reflect on the call to share the Good News



Let Us Pray

Have the candidates gather in the prayer space.

- Begin by praying the Sign of the Cross.
- Start the prayer with Dear Lord, and then together pray aloud the prayer on page 17.
- Direct the candidates to take their seats for the Scripture reflection.

Invite the young people to think about a particularly beautiful and peaceful place they have visited. Explain that the beauty and peace they experienced there can give them insight into the wonder and joy of being in God's presence.



Scripture

Guide the candidates through a reflection on the verses of Psalm 84 :2–5. You may wish to play instrumental music during the reflection.

- Invite the candidates to close their eyes and quiet themselves.
- Encourage them to open their minds and hearts to what God is saying to them.
- Proclaim the Scripture as the group listens.
- Allow for several minutes of silent reflection.
- *Ask:* What did you hear God say to you today?
- Call on volunteers to respond.

Have you ever thought . . .

Point out the photo of the bird building a nest and ask how it's connected with Psalm 84.

- Say we all have a longing for God who takes care of us and wants us to be close to him.
- Have the candidates take out some paper and write down their thoughts and answers for the two questions.
- Ask for volunteers to share their answers.

Getting Started

Use page 18 to introduce the candidates to the key themes of this unit.

- Invite a volunteer to read aloud the Getting Started paragraph.
- *Ask:* What does Jesus' instruction to "make disciples of all nations" mean in the world today?
- Invite several volunteers to respond. (Possible responses: bringing Jesus' message of love and mercy to all people, especially those who suffer; being models of Christian charity for others; sharing the Gospel message with others; inviting others to see what the Church is all about.)

ACTIVITY

Help for the Mission

Read aloud the activity directions.

- Have the candidates make notes in the graphic organizer for the activity.
- Encourage them to reflect on their responses and then write their impact statement in the space provided at the bottom of the page. They should choose a practice they take part in regularly and discuss its impact on their lives.
- Call on volunteers to share their answers.

Optional Activity

Share with the candidates that today we have countless means to reach other people to teach the Good News.

- Organize the young people in groups of three or four.
- Have groups work together to identify ways for spreading the Gospel today that were not available to the first disciples. Explain that their lists can include media, technology, transportation, and anything else that facilitates our ability to visit with or talk to people in around the world.
- After the candidates have completed their lists, have the teams take turns sharing their lists with everyone.
- *Ask:* How is our work of evangelizing easier today than it was for the Apostles? How might modern advances make it more challenging?

Symbol of Our Faith

Summarize the text about holy water on page 19.

- Point out that blessing with holy water is usually accompanied by the Sign of the Cross.
- *Ask:* Why is blessing ourselves with holy water a reminder of our Baptism?
- Call on volunteers to respond.

Encounter with Christ

Invite a volunteer to read aloud “Jesus Is Always with Us.”

- *Ask:* How do you think the Apostles felt when Jesus’ promised that he would always be with them? Why?
- Call on volunteers to respond.
- What does Jesus’ promise mean to you personally?

Catechist Tip

Proclaiming the Word of God Repeating and displaying short passages from the Bible allows God’s Word to take root in the hearts of your young people. Matthew 28:19–20 is a powerful message from Jesus. It contains an instruction and a promise: “Go ... make disciples” and “I am with you always.” Your class will read more from this passage, known as the Great Commission, later in the unit. For now, you may wish to have the candidates locate the passage in their Bibles, with a volunteer proclaiming verses 19 and 20 aloud. This will increase the candidates’ familiarity with the passage and open their hearts to a greater understanding of its meaning.

Objectives

- Develop an understanding of the Great Commissioning
- Reflect on what it means to teach others to observe all that Jesus has commanded

Sent Forth to Share the Good News

Invite a volunteer to read aloud the Scripture from Matthew’s Gospel on page 20.

- Lead a discussion of the Scripture, using the following questions:
 - What did Jesus commission the Apostles to do?
 - Jesus said to teach others “to observe all that I have commanded you.” What are some specific teachings that might be included here? (Possible answers include the Beatitudes, the Great Commandment, forgiving one another, or any other of Jesus’ teachings from the Gospels.)

The Sacrament of Christ

Have the candidates remain in their groups to read this section together.

- When they are done, they can work on these questions:
 - Describe what a Sacrament is?
 - How is the Church a Sacrament? Make sure to use the Eucharist in your explanation.

Have each group write its answer to the last question on the board or on a large sheet of paper so everyone can see.

- As a class, work out the best answer and leave it on the board or on its own sheet of paper.

ACTIVITY

Reflect

Invite the class to work in small groups to answer the Reflect questions.

- Call on volunteers from each group to share their responses.

Optional Activity

Responding to Jesus' Call

If time allows, consider using this activity to help the group deepen its understanding of the Great Commission and how each member takes part in this mission. An Internet connection or newspapers and current events magazines will be needed.

- Organize the young people into small groups.
- Distribute resources.
- Instruct the groups to research and choose a region of the world that is in need of hearing the Gospel message.
- Have them develop an “evangelization plan” that tells how they will help the people of their chosen nation or region hear the Gospel. Explain that they will share their plan with the class.
- Tell the groups to include the following information in their plans: country or region they will evangelize, and why it is in need of evangelizing; an objective (that is, their goal in a brief statement); team members and their assigned roles; specific actions the team will carry out; resources they will need to complete their mission.
- Call on a spokesperson from each group to share its evangelization plan.

The Seven Sacraments

Call on volunteers to read aloud the text on page 21.

- Ask the following or similar questions:
 - Why is it fitting that the word sin comes from a word that means “missing the mark”?
 - How do the Sacraments strengthen us in avoiding sin? (They give us God’s grace and forgiveness.)
- Explain that after Baptism, two other Sacraments especially give us the grace to avoid sin: Reconciliation and the Eucharist. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we are forgiven of mortal and venial sins and receive the gift of God’s grace that leads us to conversion. When we receive the Eucharist we are spiritually nourished. We are drawn more closely to Christ and forgiven of venial sins.

Sanctifying and Actual Grace

Read aloud the text at the bottom of page 21.

- Point out that the word *efficacious* shares a common root with the word *effective*—meaning “successful in producing a desired result.” Explain that the Sacraments bring about what they signify: they bring God’s forgiveness, healing, nourishment, strength, and so on. They aren’t just a sign of God’s life and love, they give us a share in his life and love.
- Review the definition of the word *grace* on pages 19 and 20.
- *Ask:* What are some examples of grace at work in your life?
- Call on volunteers to respond.

Optional Activity

If time allows, use the following activity to expand the discussion about how God’s grace is at work in our daily lives.

- Distribute white or light-colored construction paper and colored pencils or markers.
- Direct the candidates to write the letters of the word *grace* in a decorative style vertically on the left side of their paper.
- Have the young people write a phrase about grace starting with each letter. Phrases can describe grace or how it is at work in their lives.
- Call on volunteers to share their statements for each of the letters.
- Display the acrostics around the classroom throughout the study of this unit.

Objectives

- Learn about Baptism and the effects of the Sacrament
- Reflect on the meaning of the baptismal promises

Baptism Washes Away Our Sin

Read aloud the first two paragraphs on page 22.

- Talk with the candidates about their Baptisms or the Baptisms of family members. Invite the young people to tell whether they were baptized as infants or as older children. If any were baptized at an older age and can recall their Baptism, invite them to talk about the experience.

Read aloud the remaining text.

- Share the following additional points with the group:
 - In Baptism, we are born to new life in Christ and are saved from sin.
 - Baptism is the first Sacrament through which we are united to Christ.
 - As baptized Christians, we are called to witness to Christ in all aspects of our lives.

Go to the Source

Organize the candidates into small groups for the Go to the Source feature.

- Distribute Bibles (one per small group), poster board (one sheet per group), and colored pencils or markers.
- Have the candidates read Galatians 3:26–29, about being baptized in Christ. Then have group members work together to complete their posters.
- Invite the groups to present their posters.
- Following the presentation, ask: “If we are ‘clothed’ in Christ, what good habits should we adopt?”
- Call on volunteers to respond.

Celebrating the Sacrament—Renewal of Baptismal Promises

Have a volunteer read this paragraph at the bottom of page 22.

- Have the candidates describe what is going on in the photo as it relates to this feature.
- Explain that now we will look more closely at how those baptismal promises impact our lives.

“I do”

Read aloud the paragraphs on page 23.

- Point out that the baptismal promises reflect the statements of the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds, which we pray at Mass. Then turn to the Baptismal Promises section on Live page 24. Call on a volunteer to read the bishop’s parts, with the rest of the class joining together to respond “I do.”
- For each statement, invite volunteers to explain in their own words what the statement means. Clarify any misunderstandings, and provide further instruction on any statements the candidates do not fully grasp.

Steps in the Order of Confirmation

Have the group read this section back on page 23 quietly while you write the four steps of the Order of Confirmation on the board.

- When you and the candidates have finished, have them turn their books over and ask what each of the steps signifies. You might have to prompt them.
- Ask what are the essential steps for the Sacrament of Confirmation. (Answer: The essential action and formula for Confirmation are found in the fourth step: Laying on of the hand while anointing with Chrism and the essential formula).

Objectives

- Learn about Baptism through interviews
- Reflect on how to live the mission as Jesus' disciples each day
- Consider ways to live out what has been learned
- Explore the faith life of Saint Francis Xavier

Baptismal Promises

Give the candidates time to read and reflect on the Baptismal Promises to Keep chart on page 24.

- Ask volunteers to share their ideas on specific actions to live each promise.

ACTIVITY

Keeping Promises

Have the candidates work alone in answering these questions at the bottom of page 24.

- Explain that they are answering these for themselves and should reflect on them again later at home.

Optional Activity

Baptism Interviews Organize the class in pairs. Invite candidates to interview one another about their Baptisms. Note: If time allows for it, some of this activity should be assigned ahead of time, including bringing in photos of their own Baptisms and discussing what family members said about that day.

- After all the candidates have been interviewed, invite volunteers to share reasons to be grateful for Baptism.
- Invite volunteers to answer the question, "What does it mean for you to be a son or daughter of God?"
- If time allows, provide further enrichment about the Sacrament by sharing with the candidates the background text below on godparents.

Catechist Background

When someone is baptized into the Catholic Church, he or she must have a sponsor, called a godparent. Traditionally, two godparents are chosen—one of each gender—but only one is required. The godparents must have been baptized and confirmed and must be practicing Catholics. Godparents support their godchildren by teaching them about the Catholic faith, helping them prepare to receive the other Sacraments, and being models of what it means to live as a disciple of Jesus in the Church. It is recommended that a Confirmation candidate choose one of his or her godparents to be the Confirmation sponsor.

Listening with Our Hearts

Read aloud the first two paragraphs on page 25.

- Invite a volunteer to read Blessed John Henry Newman's reflection.
- Following the reading, allow time for silent reflection.

ACTIVITY

Connect

Have the candidates work on the Connect activity, then invite them to write prayers to the Holy Spirit.

- Conclude by giving the young people the chance to offer their prayers, either silently or aloud.

Optional Activity

Saints Who Answered the Call If time allows, consider using this activity to expand the candidates' understanding of what it means to go to all nations to teach and baptize, and to provide examples of those who have answered this call to a heroic degree. Internet access or books about the saints will be needed for this activity.

- Organize the young people into six groups.
- Assign each group one of the following saints: Paul, Thomas the Apostle, Augustine of Canterbury, Cyril and Methodius, Francis Xavier, Junipero Serra.
- Direct the candidates to research their assigned saint and prepare a summary that includes the following information: when the saint(s) lived; place of origin; where he traveled to bring the Good News and baptize; an important achievement.
- Invite the groups to take turns presenting their summaries.

Saint Francis Xavier

Invite a volunteer to read aloud the text on page 26 about Saint Francis Xavier.

- *Ask:* How did Saint Francis Xavier respond to Jesus' call to go to all nations and teach and baptize?
- Call on volunteers to respond.
- Share with the candidates that even though Saint Francis and many other saints, provide a heroic example of living Jesus' teaching, they don't have to go to extremes to live as good disciples of Jesus. Explain that they can teach about Jesus and lead others to him through even very simple actions, such as showing kindness, not going along with peers making an immoral choice, or attending Mass on Sunday.
- Read aloud the following words from a prayer attributed to Saint Francis Xavier, and invite the young people to silently reflect on the words: "Do not permit that your Son ... remain unknown..., but with the help of your saints and the Church, ... make them know him ... who is our salvation."

Take the Message Home

Read aloud the text.

- *Ask:* What are some ways you can strengthen and nurture your faith this week? Whom can you invite to share in one faith-building activity?
- Invite volunteers to respond.
- Encourage the candidates to commit to following through on at least one way to share the Good News through their words, and one way to share it through their actions.

Prepare and Pray

- Direct the candidates to write an answer on a slip of paper to this question: What part of this lesson did you find most helpful in strengthening your faith and why?
- Have them save the slip of paper for the unit prayer.



Unit Prayer

Gather around a prayer table, or in another sacred space, with a Bible, a candle, and a container of holy water.

Catechist: Let us take a deep breath and become aware of the presence of God with us. Let's begin with the Sign of the Cross.

All: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Catechist: We have explored our Baptism and examined how we can now make our own those promises made for us by our parents. We have seen how each sacramental celebration is an encounter with the living Christ, most especially in the Eucharist. We have also been made aware of how we may fit into the Church's mission given by Christ to go and make disciples. Please take out your slips of paper and read what you found most important from this unit.

[Individually, each candidate reads what he or she wrote and why.]

Catechist: Loving Father, we thank you for opening our hearts and minds to what you are saying to us in our lesson. We pray that we will continue to be aware of what your Holy Spirit is prompting us to know, and how we are being called to live. Help us to follow the example you set for us through Jesus Christ your Son. Together, let us pray Glory Be to the Father.

All: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

All: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.