

Holy Baptism

MOST ASSUREDLY, I SAY TO YOU, UNLESS ONE IS BORN OF WATER
AND THE SPIRIT, HE CANNOT ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD
(JOHN 3:5)

Overview

- “But Baptism as the sacrament of regeneration, as re-creation, as the personal Pascha and the personal Pentecost of man, as the integration into the *laos*, the people of God, as ‘passage’ from an old into a new life and finally as an epiphany of the Kingdom of God”
- “It is in and through liturgy that this double nature of the Church is revealed and communicated to us. It is the proper function of the liturgy to ‘make’ the Church preparation and to reveal her as fulfillment. Every day, every week, every year is thus transformed into this double reality, into a correlation between the ‘already’ and the ‘not yet’.

Early Church Practice

- The Sacrament of Holy Baptism was performed on the Paschal night as an organic part of the annual celebration of Easter
- It is dying with Christ and being raised with Him in the Resurrection and thus, beginning to live in the “newness of life”
- Earliest paradigms of the Holy Baptism
 1. Crossing of the Red Sea
 2. The three youths in the fiery furnace
 3. Jonah in the whale
- Lent was also a time of catechesis

Sponsorship

In the early Church, the one who desired to become a Christian was brought to the bishop of the local church his sponsors, i.e. those members of the Christian community who could testify to the serious intentions of the candidate, to the genuine character of his conversion – objectively, to seek Baptism, to enter the Church

“ The ‘sponsor’ is called by the following titles: guide, near kinsman, surety and teacher.

1. ‘Guide’ because, he guides and brings (the candidate) to the priest at whose hands the baptism is perfected.
2. He is called ‘kinsman’ because he is neighbour and intimate friend of the baptized, more than other people.
3. And ‘surety’ because he stands surety on behalf of the baptized that he will fulfill all those things which he promises relating to baptism....
4. He is called ‘teacher’ because he has to teach him how to conduct himself in the church precincts and the pious practices of asceticism”.

Syrian Orthodox Tradition

The Syrian Orthodox Baptismal Liturgy has been attributed to Severus of Antioch (512-518). According to ancient manuscripts, Severus composed the baptismal liturgy in Greek and Jacob of Edessa (+708) translated it into Syriac. The Ordo of Severus is used by the Syrian Orthodox and Syrian Catholic Churches of Antioch.

In the thirteenth century, Gregorius Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286) revised and abridged the Ordo of Severus. This shorter version is used in India by all Churches belonging to the West Syriac tradition.

Major Elements

Inscription of the names of the catechumens in the Book of life is a 'sacramental act' which was originally part of the catechumenate and has now become part of the baptismal liturgy. The names were inscribed either at the beginning of the catechumenate or at the beginning of the Great Lent, which was the final and intensive phase of their preparation.

Breathing was the central act in the creation of man: "The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" (Gen 2:7). In the baptism of the new creation, the priest breathes on the face of the candidate and make him worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit. The 'breath (*ruah*) of God' was the principle of creation of the world as well as the creation of man (Gen 1:1; 2:7). The same *ruah* is the principle of the regeneration, for baptism, according to the fourth Gospel, is re-birth from 'water and Spirit' (John 3:5).

Exorcism in baptism means liberation from Satan and the forces of evil. Having been liberated, the catechumen is dedicated as a "living stone" (1 Pet 2:5) in the temple of God, which is the Church. In baptism he becomes a soldier of Christ and he enters into warfare with Satan and his army. Exorcism is an open declaration of warfare against the forces of evil and darkness into which the baptized is about to enter. The Church declares that Satan has no more any authority over the baptized.

More Elements

The important ideas of the baptismal theology are given in these prayers. The consignation is a preparation for baptism; it makes the candidate worthy of receiving 'the crown of victory'; his name is inscribed with the first borns who are inscribed in heaven By the consignation, the candidate is made worthy to receive the anointing of the Holy Spirit as well as the regeneration. In the words of Moses Bar Kepha, it is an act of restoration:

“And he marks him first of all without oil. (It is) as when a painter comes to an image which is already old and has the paint rubbed off. First he scours it and cleans it from its oldness, and then he puts paint on it and adorns it. Because if he puts paint on it before he had cleansed and scoured it, he would ruin the paints. Similarly when the priest comes to the baptized, who is old and sullied with sin, he first marks him with the cross without oil, thus cleaning off his (marks of) age, and afterwards signs him with oil, restoring him to his pristine beauty”.

Order of St Severus

PART I

1. Introductory Prayers.
2. Promiun-Sedro.
3. Readings
4. Prayer before Consignation
5. Inscription of names.
6. Insufflation.
7. Consignation of the forehead without oil.
8. Prayer before Exorcism
9. Exorcism.
10. Apotaxis (Renunciation of Satan).
11. Syntaxis (Adhesion to Christ).
12. Nicene Creed.
13. Thanks giving Prayer.

PART II

1. Introductory Prayer.
2. Prayer before anointing.
3. Anointing of the forehead with olive oil (1st prebaptismal anointing).
4. Promiun-Sedro (absent in Pampakuda).
5. Consecration of the water.
6. Mixing of cold and warm water.
7. Veiling and unveiling of the baptismal font.
8. Insufflation into the water.
9. Signing of the water.
10. Epiclesis
11. Pouring of the Holy Myron upon the water.
12. Second pre-baptismal anointing (the whole body- absent in Pampakuda).
13. Immersion.
14. Prayer before Chrismation.
15. Chrismation : Forehead followed by the whole body.
16. Prayer after Chrismation.
17. Putting on white garments.
18. Communion.
19. Crowning.
20. Conclusion.

For Further Reading

1. West Syrian Liturgical Theology by Fr Baby Varghese
2. The Scattered Pearls: A History of Syriac Literature and Sciences by HH Ignatius Aphrem I Barsoum
3. On Water and Spirit by Fr Alexander Schmemmann
4. Commentaries on Myron and Baptism by Dionysius Bar Slibi