

## BAPTISM'S FOUNDATIONAL MOMENT: OUR PASSPORT TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

All I have is one photo— and in **black and white**, no less! True, my parents weren't as interested in snapping photos as some other parents in the neighborhood, but we did not seem to mind. We had enough photos, and heaven knows some go overboard on recording every conceivable moment of their children's lives. Nevertheless, I possess a single snapshot taken right after Fr. Ken Pierre baptized me on Sunday **September 15, 1963**, a little more than two weeks after my birth. He was a “rookie” priest at our parish of Nativity of Our Lord in Saint Paul. Though now retired, he remains actively engaged in ministry in this Archdiocese to this day! And yet in that little square photo is contained a visible symbol of **my most important day** of my faith journey on this earth.

Our Baptism is the foundational moment in our Christian lives, from which we draw upon its graces each and every day. We do so to lead a good life after the pattern of our Savior, in whose name we have been reborn. For several theological and symbolic reasons, most churches were built with the Baptistry just off the Narthex, prior to entry into the main body of the church. That was no denigration of the sacrament, but rather intended to be symbolic of our entrance into the Catholic Church. As our Catechism teaches: “Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the **gateway to life in the Spirit** (*vitae spiritualis ianua*), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments.” (CCC para. #1213 quoting the Council of Florence, 1439 A.D.).

While I believe that theology is ever valid, since the Second Vatican Council a renewed appreciation of the **public nature of the sacrament** has resulted in many churches being built with a more centrally located font. Typically, they are now situated just inside the entrance to the main body of the Church, rather than in a separate Baptistry. In this way, while blessing themselves with holy water from the font, the faithful are reminded of the centrality of their own Baptism. But I have never understood the practice of locating baptismal fonts in the sanctuary, as again the element of entrance into the faith is more powerful when located at or near the entrance of the church.

The earliest known example of a baptismal font is found in the ancient house-church at **Dura Europos** (c. 232 AD), where a special room off the central courtyard, set apart from the main liturgical area, was converted to an elaborately decorated Baptistry. The font itself was covered by a dignified canopy, accompanied by several scriptural scenes depicting the Good Shepherd, Jesus and Peter walking on water, the Woman at the Well, the Healing of the Paralytic, and the Women at the Tomb. The Baptistry was often in a completely separate building— think of the massive Baptistry next to the leaning tower of Pisa, for example. Those buildings actually provided some privacy for the full-immersion Baptisms, in which the recipients were not clothed! Later, churches located the space for Baptism just inside the front door.

Our Cathedral Baptistry is dignified in its simplicity. Sixteen feet square in size, it is lined with Numidian Cipollino and dark Botticino marble. The font itself made of light Botticino, and really stands out against the darker walls and even the Tennessee Pink marble floor. The font itself is round, symbolic of the womb and reminds us that through Baptism, we are reborn into new life with Christ. While foraging in the basement recently before Holy Week, I once again came upon our **Baptismal font cover**, placed in storage about fifteen years ago. It was done so in order to facilitate the pouring of water more easily at Baptism, certainly a practical consideration worth noting. I am interested in bringing it back, as it was specifically designed for the space and is extremely well-crafted.

The Cathedral bulletin of **April 5, 1941** contains this tidbit: “We invite you to go back to the Baptistry of the Cathedral to see the beautiful new bronze cover of the Baptismal font. This is a memorial to the late Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy, given by their late daughter Mrs. Anne Kennedy Thomason. The figure is that of **St. John the Baptist** after a design by Woollett. The casting was under the supervision of the **St. Paul Statuary** under the direction of Mr. A. J. Brioschi.” **In December of the same year**, Da Prato delivered the wrought-iron Baptistry grille. It is heavy, substantial and magnificent— and it makes a regal (almost medieval) sound when you slide the heavy hatches up from the floor while opening the gate. It is solid! Please take a moment to visit

our Baptistery and consider how many thousands have been washed clean and brought into the Church at that very font. We are currently on volume 43 of our Baptismal Register, 35 of which record Baptisms after this, our fourth Cathedral, opened.

- Speaking of Baptism, **228 catechumens** (non-baptized) and 386 candidates (already baptized) were received into the Catholic Church during the Easter Vigil in this Archdiocese. Nationwide, more than 30,000 people were welcomed into the Church this Easter!
- This is my **300th Pastor's Page** since coming to the Cathedral, and I truly enjoy preparing each one. I leave for Puerto Rico tomorrow and hope to report on my visit in next Sunday's bulletin, if I am able to sneak in some writing before the Wednesday deadline.
- **Vatican Radio**, as it has been known since its debut in 1931, is officially gone. A new communications strategy has gone digital, meaning that the 40+ languages of Vatican Radio have been replaced with a webpage containing accessible audio files, while many programs have ceased all together. Not everyone in the world has an iPad or computer, and my fear is that places that relied on radio waves for Catholic news will be left out in the cold.
- Before dashing for the parking lot...it's time for the annual **Marie Marcotte Lemon Pie** Sale, courtesy of our Women's Association. I fervently urge you to head downstairs following our Sunday morning Masses (8:00, 10:00 and Noon, while supplies last). These pies are made from scratch on site in a three-day process, no less. Trust me, you will not be disappointed!
- It could be worse! As you stragglers send in those tax returns **no later than Tuesday**, please consider that during World War II, a 94% rate applied to the highest tax bracket. As recently as 1986, the highest rate was 50%, before the massive Reagan tax cuts.
- Go West, young man? Or not. More Minnesotans are moving into the cities. Ramsey County's **growth of 7.7%** since the 2010 census outpaced even fast growing Dakota County, while Carver County is the fastest growing county in the state. Still, more than half of Minnesota counties lost population in 2017, with the western counties near the South Dakota border decreasing the most.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector