



Baptism of Infants

Although the time frame for infant baptism is less strict than it was in the 1917 Code of Canon Law, which required that infants be baptized “as soon as possible,” it is very clear from canon 867 that baptism should not be postponed for more than a month:

§1. Parents are obliged to see that their infants are baptized within the first few weeks. As soon as possible after the birth, indeed even before it, they are to approach the parish priest to ask for the sacrament for their child, and to be themselves duly prepared for it.

§2. If the infant is in danger of death, it is to be baptized without any delay.

Occasionally, the Chancery receives a report of a situation where it is difficult or impossible for parents to fulfill their obligation. Some parishes offer baptismal preparation classes only once a month and will not schedule a baptism until the parents have attended, while others do not perform baptisms of infants during Lent. (While canon 856 commends the celebration of baptisms on a Sunday or, if possible, at the Easter Vigil, there is no legal basis not to celebrate infant baptisms during the Lenten season.)

Pope John Paul, addressing the German Bishops’ Conference last November, said that pastoral charity should “restrain pastors from making demands that are not required by the Church’s doctrine or law.” The Holy Father stated:

It is right that parents should be properly prepared for the baptism of their child by their pastor, but it is equally important that the first sacrament of Christian initiation should be seen primarily as God the Father’s gift to the child. The free and unmerited nature of grace is never so evident as on the occasion of a child’s baptism: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins” (1Jn4: 10).

The baptism of infants must take place year-round; neither the season of Lent nor the schedule of baptismal preparation classes should make it impossible for parents to have a child baptized within the first few weeks after birth. Any parish policies to the contrary should be revised.

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