

Introduction

**Our commitment to the Catholic social mission
must be rooted in and strengthened by our spiritual lives.
In our relationship with God we experience
the conversion of heart that is necessary
to truly love one another as God has loved us. ¹**

The *Leader's Guide to Sharing Catholic Social Teaching*, published by the United States Catholic Conference in 2000, reminds us that: "The key is to look at the social meaning of symbols and texts, not just at their personal meanings. Given our individualistic culture, this is a challenge."

One of the graces in the liturgical movement coming out of the Second Vatican Council was to see more clearly the communal character of the sacraments. The sacraments are a celebration of the community—not something that is normally done in private. They are a celebration for the nourishment of the community. It is in the renewal of the communal aspect of our sacramental life, that we find a powerful challenge to our social life and the possibility to receive the grace to put our faith into practice more powerfully.

**In a global culture driven by excessive individualism, our tradition
proclaims that the person is not only sacred but also social. . . .
The Catholic tradition teaches that human beings grow and
achieve fulfillment in community. . . .
While public debate in our nation is often divided between those
who focus on personal responsibility and those who focus on social
responsibilities, our tradition insists that both are necessary.²**

A Pre-note: Do not force your justice concerns into the liturgy. One does not need to do violence to the liturgy in order to acknowledge our social teaching or in order to be empowered into action on behalf of justice. A healthy celebration of the sacraments supports social ministry. Our sacraments are meant to be communal celebrations and to empower us into action. The following reflections are not an invitation to make every sacramental celebration into a rally against the death penalty or a reflection on the moral issues around world trade and globalization or a spelling out of right to life issues or a call for an increase in the minimum wage. Rather, these thoughts are presented to promote awareness—an awareness of the social values imbedded in our liturgical practice when it is at its best—an awareness of the larger implications that flow from the story of Jesus and the living practice of Christ among us. Our desire is to nurture awareness, not a political ideology. As Jesus says: "The truth will set you free."

¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*, 1998, <http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/contents.htm>

² Ibid.

BAPTISM AND CST

Liturgical Practice	Comment	Connection to Catholic Social Teaching	Implications
Celebration of Baptism ideally takes place in a community context, not in a private family celebration in someone's home or in an "empty" church on a Sunday afternoon.	The communal nature of the sacrament reminds us that Baptism is not a private event between God and the person, but rather a welcoming into a community of faith, a community of solidarity and shared values, a community of mutual support, a community of mutual challenge, a community that learns together.	The communal celebration of the sacrament reinforces the Principle of Solidarity. It reminds us that baptism in a community involves a commitment to a common good that is bigger than one's own family or one's personal salvation or one's own culture.	Sometimes couples object to baptizing their child at a community mass. Sometimes, adults are received into the church outside of the RCIA process. However, private baptism makes for a privatized religion. John Paul II has said that "We must reject the temptation to offer a privatized and individualistic spirituality." ³
Water	Recalls the great Exodus experience of passing through the Red Sea from slavery to freedom.	The Exodus experience is the paradigm for all the liberation experiences of the scriptures: "You have made us free by pouring the Spirit of your love into our hearts."	The one being baptized is entering into a life long process of liberation for self and for the community. God is concerned with freedom for the poor and enslaved of the world.
Water	Makes real the experience of washing and purification which we all need.	Baptism is a washing away not only of personal sin but also "the sin of the world," or what some may call social sin. It is a call into a community that supports healing of sinful structures.	In joining the Christian community, the baptized person is supported in confronting the sinfulness of the world and is made aware of the depth of social sin. The loving support of the community offers a certain protection from the sinful structures of the world.
Water	Water is necessary for refreshment and life. Christ is the "living water."	Recall the liberating stories of the woman the well (John 4) and the man born blind (John 9). Being a Christian is not a condemnation of the world, but an affirmation of the world and its goodness.	Being part of the Christian community gives the Christian person spiritual nourishment for the journey and a set of values for dealing with the social concerns of the world.

³Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, January 6, 2001, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte_it.html

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Water	Going down into the water and coming up again is the pattern of death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ.	In confronting the evil and injustice of the world, the Christian faces suffering and struggle in her/his own life and is not afraid of dealing with the struggle of the poorest and neediest of the world. Today, part of that struggle is for clean, accessible water.	The power of evil is not the final word. In faith the Christian looks forward to liberation and resurrection. Baptism in the Christian community is a sign of hope.
Special clothing (usually white) worn after the baptism	“See in this white garment the outward side of your dignity...”	Human Dignity is at the heart of Catholic Social Teaching.	The dignity of the baptized person is affirmed and also the dignity of every man, woman and child of the world.
Renunciation of Sin	This is usually done by the person being baptized and reaffirmed by the whole community already baptized. It is a community event.	The renunciation of sin includes a refusal to be mastered by sin (the sinful structures of our culture). It should be seen as a rejection of all forms of sin – personal as well as social.	It is a rejection of all the ideologies and ways of thinking that are contrary to the good news of Christ – ie. racism, materialism, sexism, militarism, etc.
Profession of Faith	The creed affirms our beliefs and our relationship with God and with each other.	The creed affirms the communion of saints and the resurrection of the body. The creed affirms the Principle of Solidarity.	Salvation is not just salvation of one’s soul in some other world, but a salvation in relationship to other people (solidarity) and the world (stewardship).
The Formula of Baptism	“I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”	Our doctrine of the Trinity affirms our belief in a “relational God.”	It challenges the American temptation to “rugged individualism.” It challenges the temptation to be concerned with our personal salvation alone.

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Naming	“What name do you give to your child?” The name of each person speaks to his or her dignity as a child of God. Behind every name there is a story.	Behind one’s name is the history of one’s family. The community welcomes people from a variety of histories and stories and ethnic backgrounds. The community welcomes, immigrants, refugees, men, women, the young, the young, the old, the rich, the poor, black and white, etc, etc. The community desires to be inclusive.	The spirit of inclusion is at the heart of Catholic Social Teaching. In joining the church one is joining a universal church, an inclusive church, a forgiving church. Our church is a church that affirms the common good.
Welcome	“The Christian community welcomes you with great joy.”	Our tradition at its best desires to welcome all our brothers and sisters who are precious children of God.	The affirmation of the human dignity of all men and women must be reflected in our behavior throughout our life.
Candle	“Receive the Light of Christ.”	Holding the light of Christ to the world helps us see that there is a divine light in all men and women.	All ideologies that exclude or stereotype people cannot be part of our faith. Any faith that is used to condemn others is not consistent with the light of Christ who came not to condemn but to give life and light.
Anointing with Oil	Anointed as “priest, prophet and king”	The Social Teaching of the Church belongs to all of us, not just the clergy and religious.	We are called to live out this teaching in our daily life. It will challenge our culture. We are all prophets.

Rising from the waters of the Baptismal font, every Christian hears again the voice that was once heard on the banks of the Jordan River: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”¹

Baptism symbolizes and brings about a mystical but real incorporation into the crucified and glorious body of Christ. The communion of Christians with Jesus has the communion of God as Trinity, namely, the unity of the Son to the Father in the gift of the Holy Spirit, as its model and source, and is itself the means to achieve this communion.²

We believe that every person is precious, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person.³

¹Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 1988, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html

²Ibid.

³United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions*, 1998, <http://www.nccbuscc.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/contents.htm>

Questions for Reflection

How has this study guide expanded your ideas about the implications of Baptism?

Brainstorm ways in which you can creatively weave Catholic Social Teaching into your parish’s celebrations of Baptism.