

**May 12–18**

Seventh Week of Easter

*Within the Word*

**Baptism in Acts of the Apostles**

“How were you baptized?” is a question that suspicious parish ministers may ask. They often have to discern whether a person’s baptism “counts” as one that the Catholic Church recognizes. The question may be posed to a Christian desiring full communion in the Catholic Church or one seeking an annulment in a marriage tribunal. It may even be posed to a Catholic before receiving some sacraments.

It’s a frustrating question in one way. What Christians do after their baptism seems more important than the ceremony. Yet, if something is questionable about the ceremony, the person who wants to enjoy the fullness of life in Christ may not be able to do it.

The question “How were you baptized?” appears in Acts of the Apostles 19:3 (Monday). Paul met a group of twelve disciples in Ephesus who claimed to be Christian but had never heard of the Holy Spirit. Paul got suspicious that they had been baptized incorrectly.

We have generous evidence from Acts *that* baptisms took place but scant evidence for *how* they took place. For example, some were baptized in large groups: three thousand people after hearing Peter (2:41) and five thousand after hearing Peter and John (4:4).

Some were baptized with the members of their households: a Gentile group already manifesting the gifts of the Spirit (10:47-48); Lydia of Thyatira, whose heart was opened by the Holy Spirit (16:15); the jailer who witnessed the miraculous freeing of Paul and Silas from prison (16:33); and a synagogue official named Crispus (18:8). The people who lived with these individuals were baptized with them as well.

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Simon the former magician was baptized in a small group (8:12-13), but others were baptized as individuals: an Ethiopian eunuch in a chariot (8:38); and Saul, the persecutor of Christians, who later became known as Paul (9:18).

Beyond this, we don't know much about the ceremony. Was it an immersion in water? Probably. After all, John had baptized Jesus in a river, and the Christian practice probably followed suit. Did they use a formula? Probably, because Jesus gives one at the end of Matthew's Gospel ("baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.")

Returning to Acts 19, whatever Paul discovered about the Christians in Ephesus, he thought they had been baptized the wrong way. He imposed hands to remedy the situation, which suggests that Paul expected handlaying to be part of the ceremony—if it was to "count."

Many Christians keep some memorabilia of their baptism—photos, video, a booklet, a garment, a candle, or a guestbook. Most of us have ample evidence *that* we were baptized. And *how* we were baptized.

Still, that other issue never goes away. Sure, the ceremony is important. But what comes next? What have we done with our baptism to share the grace of Christ with all those we meet? How will you do it this day?

—Fr. Paul Turner

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