

Baptisms at Mass: Tips for Musicians

Paul Turner

Infant baptism celebrations are undergoing a few changes with the 2020 *Order of Baptism of Children*. The latest in the series of revised liturgical books will get considerable usage in Catholic parishes throughout the English-speaking world. Musicians will want to be aware of several matters, especially on those occasions when baptisms are celebrated during a Sunday mass.

The Reasons for the New Book

There are two reasons why the English-speaking Catholic Church is receiving new liturgical books. One is the change in translation principles enacted first with the 2011 Roman Missal. These are having a rippling effect throughout other liturgical ceremonies. The second reason is that some of these books have a new edition in Latin with updated content and clarifications that have not yet been translated. Both these reasons lay behind the missal: The translation was redone, and the third edition in Latin provided new content, such as collects for saints newly added to the calendar. The same was true of the 2016 *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, which received a new translation, but also had new content, such as a greatly expanded introduction.

The 2016 *Order of Confirmation*, however, was not the product of a new Latin edition. It simply received a new translation to bring it into greater harmony with the missal. The same is now true of the 2020 *Order of Baptism of Children*. There was a second Latin edition of the original, but it has been in force for over forty years. The English translation we have been using contains all the changes from that work. This is a newly revised translation of that forty-year old second edition.

New to this book, though, is an appendix spelling out in greater detail how a baptism takes place during the course of mass. The first editions of the *Rite of Baptism for Children* explained the basic structure in paragraph 29, but it was still confusing to many people. Consequently, some parishes made further adaptations on their own. The USCCB's Committee for Divine Worship had the foresight to develop an appendix giving a clearer presentation of the celebration, and the Vatican has approved its work. So, even though we now have a revised translation of the book we've always had, it includes for the first time a section requested by our own conference of bishops, giving the book even more practicality.

The appendix includes the proper texts for the baptism of several children (250-295) and the baptism of one child (296-331). This article will reference the second option.

The Introductory Rites

Before the Order of Baptism for One Child within Mass begins, parents, godparents and the child to be baptized wait at the door of the church or in some other suitable place. The entrance chant begins (296). Musicians still have the same options they've had since the Second Vatican Council: They may sing the antiphon in the missal, or they may substitute a psalm or hymn. In most parishes, the community sings a hymn. During this time, the priest goes to the place where the baptismal party stands.

In many parishes, this group is already together at the door when the entrance song begins. In that case, it may be prudent to sing just one verse of the opening hymn. That will account for the entrance chant and gather the voices of the assembly into one.

The priest leads the sign of the cross (297), but he omits the usual greeting such as, "The Lord be with you." Instead, he gives a welcome to the baptismal party. The *Order of Baptism of Children* now scripts out a sample for him based on one that has already appeared in the Spanish translation (298). Omitting the penitential act, the priest then conducts the opening dialogue with the parents and godparents. This reaches its climax when he traces the cross on the child's forehead, instructing the parents to do the same. He may ask the godparents to sign the child as well.

In some communities, the priest has invited other people to sign the child's forehead. However, the liturgy envisions that the parents do this, with the godparents assisting if it seems appropriate. The signing of the child is their first demonstration of putting into act the pledge that they have just made. They have indeed undertaken the responsibility of raising the child in the faith.

The signing of the child gives the musician the cue to begin the next song. The procession to the altar forms, and it takes place with singing if circumstances permit (303). The suggested text is Psalm 85 (84):7, 8, 9ab. The first line addresses God in words that express the community's trust: "Will you not restore again our life?" As the child is about to be baptized, the people sing their confidence in God's power to restore human life with the gift of divine life. A different piece of music may serve. For example, if mass began with only one verse of the opening hymn, the community could now sing the rest of it.

As the priest approaches the altar, he reverences it in the usual way and goes to his chair (304). Then, on those days when it is prescribed, the Gloria is sung. It would not diverge too much from this vision to sing the Gloria in the procession to the altar in place of Psalm 85. The priest then offers the Collect (306).

The Liturgy of the Word

Musicians should be aware that during Ordinary Time, even at a parish Sunday mass, the readings may be taken from the lectionary's selections for the Conferral of Infant Baptism, as found in Volume IV, #756-760. This idea may not be commendable in a typical parish, where the readings of the day have inspired the

homily, the petitions, the music, the bulletin art, and the preparatory meditations of the people of God. But it is permitted. Theoretically, a baptism at mass could affect the choice of the responsorial psalm and gospel acclamation.

Outside Ordinary Time, the readings of the Sunday prevail, but one of the readings from the Conferral of Infant Baptism may replace one of those assigned for the day (307).

Baptism

The baptismal ceremonies begin after the homily. Surprising to many is that they start with the universal prayer, also known as the prayer of the faithful (310). This has been the sequence since the 1970 *Rite of Baptism for Children*, but many parishes have not realized it or preferred to put the petitions after the baptism, as happens with other sacramental celebrations such as marriage.

However, the *Order of Baptism of Children* puts the petitions just ahead of the litany of the saints, whom the community implores prior to baptism. Baptism still retains some exorcistic features since the child is leaving the hungry grasp of Satan and receiving divine grace. We invoke the saints to guide the way toward the font, and the petitions for the child and other members of the community precede. The parish may include its own petitions in the list. These logically come first, and then the specific prayers for the one to be baptized conclude the prayer.

For the first time, the ritual book explicitly states that the full litany of the saints may replace the shorter one. The previous English translation put the full litany in the appendix, but it never indicated when to use it. Now it is listed as an option. This was another concession that the Vatican granted the USCCB with the 2020 publication. At a Sunday mass, the full litany may prove too long, but musicians should know that they have this option.

The blessing of water is the same that appears in the missal's baptismal celebration for the Easter Vigil (317). However, the presider still has the choice of two other formulas (223-224). Musicians should be aware of these because they each include acclamations that are most often recited but could be sung. These latter two options provide a good opportunity for the full, conscious, active participation of the people by punctuating the priest's blessing with their own voices in praise of God.

For the renunciation of sin and profession of faith, the priest explicitly invites the entire community to join with the parents and godparents (319). This replaces their common recitation of the Creed.

The formula for baptism remains unchanged (323). All Catholics should know this formula in case of emergency. And no minister should alter these words. They are essential for the validity of the sacrament.

Immediately after the baptism, musicians may lead the community in an acclamation. The ritual book has always offered a selection of these, but now one of them will appear in the text as a reminder: "Blessed be God, who chose you in Christ" (323).

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Mass resumes when the explanatory rites conclude (328). The priest should become familiar with the missal's ritual mass For the Conferral of Baptism. It suggests prefaces and offers proper formulas for intercessions within the four main eucharistic prayers. If he uses the Roman Canon, he actually names the godparents right within the heart of the prayer. This practice probably stemmed from adult initiation, where the names of the parents would matter less than the names of those who had sponsored the newly baptized.

Some Other Points

Musicians may be interested in a few other aspects of the new book that do not bear directly upon their ministry as musicians, but address circumstances they sometimes encounter.

Greater attention has been paid to gender-inclusive language in the translation. For example, while anointing with the oil of catechumens, the priest or deacon used to say that the Son of God came "to rescue man from the kingdom of darkness, and bring him into the splendor of your kingdom of light" (49). Now he says that the Son came "to bring the human race, rescued from darkness, into the marvelous kingdom of your light."

At the Ephphatha, the minister used to proclaim that Jesus "made the deaf hear and the dumb speak" (65). In the United States, the word "dumb" is considered offensive. (The same is not true in some other English-speaking countries, which explains how the word first appeared in this prayer.) The translation has changed to proclaim Jesus who "made the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

Deacons assisting at a baptism during mass have a secondary role because the priest presides over the entire ceremony. The church's law does not clearly state that a deacon may baptize (or witness a marriage) during mass. Yet sometimes it seems desirable for him to do so: He may be the infant's grandfather; he may have prepared the couple for marriage; he may speak a language that the family knows but that the presider does not. In those instances, it is advisable for the deacon to obtain permission from the bishop to preside for such a ceremony within mass.

The one who confers baptism "should strive above all to be courteous and affable to everyone" (7). A similar rubric appears in other ritual books, such as the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* and the *Rite of Penance*. It makes a person wonder if the group preparing these rituals after the Second Vatican Council included bishops tired of hearing complaints about grumpy priests, or people who themselves had suffered from discourteous ministers. Even though these words are directed to pastors and others who preside over these rites, they supply a reminder for all ministers. Even musicians "should strive above all to be courteous and affable to everyone." This will help seal a beautiful celebration and provide a subtle though sincere message of evangelization. When we gather for sacraments, we celebrate them. Our hearts should be happy.

The Order of Baptism of Children

Parents are happy at the birth of a child, and the church is happy to introduce that child to sacramental life in Christ.

“The Revised *Baptism of Children*: What It Means for Pastoral Musicians.” *Pastoral Music* 20:20 (44:2):10-14.