

# The New Code of Canon Law

## Baptism and the Revised Code

By Father Kevin McKenna  
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**Does the new code contain much legislation concerning the sacraments and rites of the Church?**

Canon 2 states a fundamental principle that was also contained in the 1917 code. For the most part, the code does not define rites to be observed in celebrating liturgical actions. These proper liturgical norms are found in other liturgical books, rituals, etc. However, Book 4 of the new code does contain some basic liturgical directions and norms for the celebration of the sacraments, and established some canonical requirements for ministers and recipients of sacraments. Many of the changes in the code are a direct result of the Vatican Council II document "The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy."

**Why is the sacrament of baptism particularly important in the revised code?**

In addition to being the "gateway to the sacraments" and necessary for salvation (Canon 849), baptism is also the means by which an individual is incorporated into the Church with membership that includes certain duties and rights (Canon 96).

**Are there any significant changes concerning baptism in the new code?**

A recurring theme in the code for all the sacraments is preparation. An adult who desires to receive baptism is to be admitted to the catechumenate (formation process which entails several stages). The parents of an infant who is to be baptized are to be properly instructed in the meaning of the sacrament and the obligations that are attached to it. The sponsors of the infant are likewise to be informed of their responsibilities in regard to baptism. The pastor is invited by Canon 851,2, to gather families together for preparation programs that should include counsel and common prayer.

**According to the Code of 1983, may infant baptism be delayed by a minister of the Church?**

The possibility of deferring baptism is quite clearly articulated in Canon 868,2. Deferral is possible when it is apparent that the child will not be supported in the faith by the family — when there is not a "founded hope that the infant will be

brought up in the Catholic religion." This procedure is carefully detailed in our own diocesan sacramental guidelines, which require that the parents be made aware for the reasons for this delay. It is hoped that dialogue and proper pastoral care will bring the parents to appreciate their most important role in Catholic formation after the sacrament is conferred.

**What are the requirements for being a sponsor for a Catholic baptism?**

The term "sponsor," rather than "godparent," indicates the continuance of a very ancient Church tradition. A member of the faith community assists the adult preparing for baptism at least in his or her final preparation and after baptism to help the adult persevere in the faith. Sponsors also help parents in professing the Church's faith. Only one person of each sex is to be employed (Canon 873). The sponsor should be fully initiated into the Church — having received baptism, Eucharist and confirmation — and must be at least 16 years of age. A person who is not initiated and committed to the faith cannot appropriately fulfill that extremely important responsibility of sharing his or her own faith life with the child as he or she matures.

**May a non-Catholic who is a member of another faith community serve as a sponsor for a Catholic baptism?**

According to Canon 874,2, a non-Catholic may not serve as a sponsor. However, he or she — along with a Catholic sponsor — may participate in the ceremony as an official "witness."

**Where may baptism be administered?**

As a rule, adults are to be baptized in their own parishes, and infants in the parishes of their parents (Canon 857,2). Baptism is not to be conferred in private homes unless the local bishop permits this for a grave reason. This regulation is designed to maintain the meaning of baptism as a sacrament of initiation into a "family of believers." The Church is extremely concerned with initiation into the parish family, where the child's faith will be celebrated and nourished.

*Next week: The new law and the sacrament of marriage.*

Father Albert Shamon

# A Word for Sunday



**Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 7:36-8:3; (R1) 2 Samuel 12:7-10, 13; (R2) Galatians 2:16, 19-21.**

The Lucan gospel tells of the historic encounter between Jesus and "a woman known ... to be a sinner." Tradition identifies this woman with Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany. All three women are one.

Magdala was less than three miles from Tiberias. Herod Antipas had built the city in honor of Tiberias Caesar around 20 A.D. Besides his luxurious palace, Magdala boasted of an arena that could seat 10,000 spectators and a hot springs that made it a resort for the rich. Its magnificence and wealth attracted the vivacious, fascinating, good-looking Mary. Befriended by Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward, she entered Herod's court and was soon seduced by its luxury and pleasures.

Mary Magdalene has often been depicted as a bedraggled, unkempt street prostitute. She was not. She was a palace courtesan — richly attired, impeccably groomed — an associate of men of high rank and seen publicly with them at official functions. Hence, she became "known in the town to be a sinner."

She was, therefore, wealthy. Her precious spikenard poured on the feet of Jesus would have cost a working man his year's pay. Outrageously demonstrative, she undid her long, magnificent tresses to wipe the feet of Jesus, as her bitter tears mingled with the perfumed oil. Her tears admitted guilt. She knew her sins, and so did He whose feet she embraced.

Both Magdala and Tiberias were on the road Jesus often took back and forth from Capernaum and Judea. Probably on one of these occasions, Mary, in the company of Joanna, heard Jesus preach. Both of them raved so to Herod that "he was anxious to meet Jesus" (Luke 9:7-9). Mary, however, was more than curious; she was touched and went to Jesus who was dining at the house of Simon.

Simon was scandalized, but not Jesus. Moved by her tears — mute tongues of self-accusation — ad her anointing, the great heart of Jesus forgave the sinner and sent her away in peace. Later she, Joanna and others accompanied

Jesus and ministered to Him on His journeys.

When Jesus left Galilee for Judea, it seems He made Bethany — the home of Mary Magdalene, Martha and Lazarus — His headquarters.

In the sixth century, Pope St. Gregory the Great proclaimed: "We believe that the one that Luke calls a 'sinner,' that John names 'Mary, is the same one of whom, according to Mark, 'seven demons were expelled.'" Before him, St. Jerome and Origen said the same thing. In fact, up to the 15th century, the sinner in Luke's gospel, Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany were always thought to be one and the same person.

But in every age several critics arise who refute old beliefs and introduce new theories in the interpretation of scriptures. They usually manage to stir up controversy, divide opinions and often leave the Christian world the poorer for it.

This happened in the 15th century. New opinions about Mary Magdalene arose. Some divided her into two distinct women: Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany. Others even made her into three: the sinner and the two Marys. Is it not strange that we hear nothing of "Mary of Bethany" — only of Mary Magdalene; that we have feasts for Martha and Mary Magdalene and none for Mary of Bethany?

Some felt it improper that a sinner play so great a role in the life of Jesus. Yet Jesus consorted with sinners (Luke 5:27-32) and shocked His critics by saying, "harlots and publicans are closer to heaven than you are" (Matthew 21:31-32).

Jesus took a sinner — one who was despised — to show that God is above the petty judgments of men, and glorified her because she had loved more than all others and because He wished to prove that love can transform a sinner into a saint. Amor vincit omnia — Love conquers all things.

Should you wish to pursue the Magdalene question, I recommend Edith Fillette's book, *St. Mary Magdalene*, \$9.50 from The Society of Mary Magdalene, Box 18, Newton Lower Falls, Mass. 02162.

### Charismatic Mass set

The Charismatic Prayer Groups of the Elmira area will present a charismatic Mass on Friday, June 13, at 7:30 p.m. at St. John the Baptist Church, 325 Lake St., Elmira. Prayers

for healing will follow the Mass. All are welcome.



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