

## Reflection for Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2020

I read an interesting story recently about a priest who had been ordained about 3 years ago. He went to see his parents one evening and asked to see the video of his baptism. As he watched it he was horrified because the deacon who carried out the baptism had not used the correct formula. He said, ‘We baptise you...’ instead of ‘I baptise you..’ This may not seem very significant but for a sacrament to be valid the correct words and actions have to be performed. It would be the same if the priest used his own words at the consecration or used a cream cracker and ribena instead of bread and wine, it would not be valid. The form of the sacraments is given to us by the Church and they are carried out by the minister on behalf of the Church not on behalf of himself.

So what happened to the priest? He knew straightaway that his ordination was invalid, he knew that not only was he not a priest but he wasn’t even a Christian. He reported the matter to his bishop who referred it to Rome. Eventually he was baptised properly and confirmed and then in a quiet ceremony with just his immediate family present he was ordained.

His situation hadn’t been announced to the parish, no one knew what had happened. They just knew he’d been out of the parish for a week or so. He arrived to celebrate morning Mass — it would be his very first validly offered Mass.

He never did tell his parishioners as he didn’t want to cause any upset in the parish but he made the point that, ‘... the sacraments are not something we can mess around with, they’re something we receive from Christ through the Church.’

“It’s Christ who speaks, he said, ‘As ministers of the sacraments, we don’t speak our own voice, but it’s Christ who speaks through us. Our job is to get out of the way. And we do that by faithfully celebrating the rites that the Church has given us,’”

I think this incident can teach us a lot about the reality of the sacraments. The sacraments are the symbols of our encounter with God and the primary way we receive His grace. However, they are more than symbols, they actually bring about what they symbolise. So, when we receive Holy Communion the host is not just a symbol or sign of Jesus' Body and Blood but actually becomes the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus. But, belief in this article of faith is dwindling. A recent survey of Catholics, including priests, show that 80% do not believe this and think it is only a symbol.

Similarly with Baptism, the action of pouring water over the head three times while saying the correct words actually takes away original sin and enables the one baptised to be a member of Christ's Church. The action of pouring the water and saying the words must be carried out by the same person and the words must refer to the three persons of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and not alternatives such as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier which have sometimes been used by ministers who want to keep it nongender specific. Although you can only receive the sacrament of Baptism once, if there are any doubts about validity then a conditional Baptism can be performed.

Finally it's worth pointing out that although Jesus gave the sacraments to His Church He is not bound by them. It would be a misunderstanding to say that only those who have been baptised can get to Heaven but I like to think of it as a guarantee of the promise of eternal life. As Jesus himself says in St Matthew's gospel, *'I tell you in all truth whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven...'*

Deacon Kevin