

TRINITY NEWS

WEEK 20
May 15, 2022

Thoughts on the Sacraments (2) *Baptism (& Confirmation)*

If you compare the 1979 American Prayer Book (the one in your pews) with the one that came before it, one of the first things you'll notice - after the disappearance of 'thou, thee, ye etc. - is the new emphasis on the importance of Baptism and its inherently public nature. It is now the norm - or supposed to be - that Baptisms will be performed within the context of the Sunday Eucharist, and people are urged to try to hold them on specific feasts, e.g. the Epiphany, the Great Vigil of Easter, Pentecost and a few others. All this is in sharp contrast to previous practice: Baptism, for a long time, had been considered largely a private, family affair and seldom done as part of Sunday Communion. This move has restored the practice of the early Church, and is preserved in our new Filipino BCP.

Another ancient custom that has been restored in the Anglican rite is chrismation, or the sealing - anointing with Holy Oil. As far as I know, the only anointing that was prescribed in any Anglican liturgy was the anointing of the Monarch at his/her coronation!

Baptism is one of the two Dominical Sacraments, therefore required of everyone. Unlike the Eucharist, however, Baptism can only be received once - there is no such thing as re-baptism. The sacramental 'sign' at Baptism is water poured on the candidate, and the inner 'grace, according to our Catechism, 'is "union with Christ in his death and resurrection, birth into God's family the Church, forgiveness sins, and new life in the Holy Spirit.' I understand it also as a sort of liberation from the power of the 'spiritual powers and principalities of this world, and this is reflected in the language of the Thanksgiving over the Water (the blessing), recalling as it does to the waters through which God led is people out of the bondage of Egypt and 'into the land of promise.'

Most Christian denominations practice infant baptism; but those of the Baptist tradition reject it and require that the candidate be old enough to make their own baptismal commitment. For most Churches, persons who were baptized as infants, reaffirm the commitment made for them by their parents and godparents at the Sacrament of Confirmation. Since, however, Baptism is now recognized generally as bestowing full membership in Christ's body no matter what the age of the candidate, Confirmation is no longer considered necessary for admission to Communion.

SAINTS:

Alcuin of York, Abbot of Tours, Teacher of the Faith. 20 May. Alcuin was descended from a noble Northumbrian family. Although the date and place of his birth are not known, he was probably born in the year 735 in or near York. He entered the cathedral school there as a child, continued as a Scholar and became Master. In 781, he went to Aachen as adviser to Charlemagne on religious and educational matters and as Master of the Palace School, where he established an important library. Although not a monk and in deacon's orders, in 796 he became Abbot of Tours, where he died in the year 804. Alcuin wrote poetry, revised the lectionary, compiled a sacramentary and was involved in other significant liturgical work.

Helena, Protector of the Holy Places. 21 May. The Empress Helena only achieved power in the Roman Empire when her son Constantine became Emperor, in the year 306. Although she had previously been abandoned by her husband, her son raised her to a position of great honour. As Helena was a Christian she gave her support to their cause and, in the year 326, she made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. There she provided the wherewithal to found the building of a basilica on the Mount of Olives and another at Bethlehem. According to a much later tradition, she discovered the cross on which Christ was crucified. In the Eastern Church, she is commemorated on this day, together with her son Constantine.