Accompanying this book is an “enhanced CD” that contains audio tracks that can be played on any CD player or computer media player, and also files that you can read, copy, and print from your computer.

Contents

Reproducible files
These files are accessible by your computer and its programs when the CD is inserted into the computer’s CD drive.

- **Rediscovering Baptism.pdf**: This is a printable version of the script for the process described in Chapter 3 of the book.
- **Rediscovering Baptism.doc**: This is an editable version (in Microsoft® Word format) of the script for the process described in Chapter 3 of the book.
- **GodWhoAtTheFont.tif**: This is an image file of the people’s version of the hymn “God, Who at the Font Once Named Us.” It can be inserted into a document that you create for the use of the people during the prayer service from Chapter 3 of the book, or it can be printed by itself.
- **GodWhoAtTheFont-Acc.pdf**: This is a printable version of the accompaniment to the hymn “God, Who at the Font Once Named Us.” It is for your accompanist to use when the people sing this hymn.

Audio Tracks
This music can be played by your CD player just like any other audio CD. Simply insert the disk and push “play.” The music is also accessible by the media player on your computer. Depending on your operating system, the tracks may appear in a separate drive from the other files on the disk.

These are instrumental pieces that can be played during the prayer service in Chapter 3 of the book, while the participants are approaching the baptismal waters.

1. Peace Is Flowing
2. Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence
3. Veni, Creator Spiritus
4. Amazing Grace
That summer, while visiting my family in Massachusetts, I became excited about what was shaping up—at least in my own mind—to be a holy pilgrimage. I had never seen the font in which I was baptized and as the day approached, I became more and more excited.

I drove from the Boston area to New Bedford, about seventy-five miles. Saint Anthony’s Church is in a somewhat impoverished area of the city. The church building is, in a word, massive.

When I arrived, I tried to open every door, but each was locked. I rang the bell at the rectory next door and a French-Canadian nun answered. I explained that I had been baptized at Saint Anthony’s and that I had traveled from Florida, hoping to make a visit to the inside of the church. She unlocked a door leading directly from the rectory into the nave. When I walked into the church, vivid childhood memories immediately flooded my mind. The ornate interior is stunning to the eye. There are many, many statues of
saints and angels throughout the building. I remembered going to Mass there with my grandparents when I was a very young child and having trouble locating the priest among all the statuary, until I figured out that he was the one who was actually moving!

I made my way up the center aisle of this massive church and into the sanctuary. On the left was a set of doors that I assumed were the entry doors into the sacristy. I hoped that they would be unlocked, and they were.

When I walked into the sacristy, I was immediately struck by its size. And there it was. In a corner of the sacristy was an area surrounded by a wooden barrier, rather like a Communion rail. There was a gate in the barrier that led into the area where the baptism font still stood, just as my father had described. It became instantly obvious that the place and the font were no longer used for baptism. There were old vestments strewn about with other discarded items. I approached the font and moved some of the items away from it.

The font was fashioned of wood, beautifully carved, with a large lid that I assumed would slide open to reveal the actual bowl inside. As I approached, I could feel my heart racing. I once again thought of all those ordination invitations from my friends. I thought of how unsure my spiritual footing had become. I had very high hopes in that moment.

I reached out and gave the top lid of the font a little push and, sure enough, it began to move. The lid opened and inside I saw three small chambers, probably enameled over some kind of steel (rust had formed around the edges) that once held the baptismal water. I just stood there and stared inside this font, thinking to myself, “My little head was once right here.” I was overwhelmed with emotion. “Right here,” I thought, “right here is where my life changed forever.” As I continued to stare into the font through my tears, I thought, “What happened right here meant that my life would never be the same again.” I know that God gives us moments in our lives when things seem to be crystal clear, just for a brief moment. This experience was one of those moments, for which I will always be grateful.
I found what I was looking for in the Second Vatican Council’s *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, at paragraph 109.

The season of Lent has a twofold character: primarily by recalling or preparing for baptism and by penance, it disposes the faithful, who more diligently hear the word of God and devote themselves to prayer, to celebrate the paschal mystery. This twofold character is to be brought into greater prominence both in the liturgy and by liturgical catechesis.

I had discovered that there really were two strands that were woven together to create the theology of Lent: the baptismal and the penitential.

All throughout my Catholic upbringing, I never really heard anything about Lent being connected with baptism. I recalled that the penitential character of Lent was all I had ever learned and been schooled in. We made the little “mite boxes” when I was in Catholic grammar school, into which we put our change during Lent to be shared with the poor. That was our almsgiving practice. I remember my parents desperately trying to get us— their six children—to pray the rosary together on the Friday evenings of Lent. This was part of our practice of prayer. We were always told that we needed to “give something up” for Lent, part of our practice of fasting. It was the penitential practices that had formed Lent for me throughout my life. This baptism idea was something completely new to me.

So I made a personal spiritual decision as the next Lenten season began to approach. I decided that I would spend those forty days not embracing the penitential practices as much, but really focusing on the baptismal nature of the season. I wanted to spend forty days thinking about and preparing for the renewal of my baptism promises at the Easter Vigil. So as Lent began, I found myself listening to the scriptures at Mass with ears open to the baptismal imagery and theology expressed in the texts. I sang and listened to the music of Lent and heard new things about baptism in those texts. Lent simply took on a very different character for me.
Then came the moment for which I had prepared for forty days: the renewal of my own baptism promises at the Easter Vigil. Our parish baptized a number of adults again that year and the baptisms were glorious. As I watched these new Christians “put on Christ,” I could feel the anticipation build for my own renewal. And then the moment arrived. We all lit our candles and the renewal, in a word, seemed flat to me. We all responded to the questions (Do you renounce Satan, etc.) with our somewhat perfunctory “I do’s.” I wanted it to have much more of an impact. After all, I had focused on this for so long. Then, when it came time for the sprinkling of the baptismal water over the faithful who had just renewed our promises, it became even flatter for me. The celebrant used an aspergillum to do the sprinkling, and I am now convinced that what came out of that aspergillum probably amounted to a few tablespoons of water sprinkled over a congregation of more than nine hundred people! When the celebrant came over to the choir, he lifted the aspergillum once, waved it in our direction, and not one drop of water even touched me! But, as does every Catholic, I made the obligatory sign of the cross, even though no water came near me.

I was left with such a hollow feeling. I had spent so much time, energy, and prayer preparing for this moment, and frankly, the ritual words and gestures were quite empty. I made up my mind then and there that future Lenten seasons would be quite different for the parishes at which I was a liturgy and music director.

The following year, we made some changes.

1. At our liturgy committee meetings, we read articles and discussed the “two strands” of Lent. I facilitated discussions that centered on sharing the stories of our own baptisms. We talked about all of us being committed to spending Lent aware of the “two strands.”

2. We published parish bulletin articles that spoke about the “two strands” of Lent. These articles invited parishioners to spend their time and energy during Lent preparing for the renewal of their baptism promises at Easter.
the doors, we were instructed to return to our tour bus where our pilgrimage would continue.

You can imagine my reaction: “Many of us have traveled thousands of miles to get into this baptistery, not just to see the doors!” After some negotiation and a passing of the hat, we were told that we could gain access. My heart was leaping with joy.

But what a disappointment! Once we entered, I discovered that there is no baptism font in the space anymore. The guide told us that the font had been removed and the building was used for ceremonial purposes of the state. I stood there feeling totally dejected. My mother happened to be on the pilgrimage and she was standing next to me in that baptistery. She gave me a nudge and when I looked at her, I saw that she was staring straight up. I wondered what she was looking at, so I looked up as well. To this day, I remember that moment, the moment when my breath was taken away. We were beholding the ceiling of the baptistery, completely covered in a stunning mosaic. And what did that enormous mosaic depict? Simply put, the kingdom of heaven.
I stood there, staring up at this ceiling. Even though there was no baptism font in this space any longer, something began to sink in. I imagined what it must have been like if I had been baptized in that building. I thought about what it would have been like for me to emerge from the font, wet with the waters of baptism, looking up as I emerged from the waters, and beholding this image of the kingdom of heaven! I was stunned by this image, and almost immediately I began to understand what the Christian life, the Christian journey is all about.

For the Christian, our life’s journey is a pilgrimage from the font to, if you will, our place on the ceiling. We spend our entire post-baptismal life living out the fact that we have “put on Christ,” travelling along our pilgrimage, transforming the worlds in which we find ourselves, making these worlds more and more like God’s kingdom until, finally, we reach that kingdom—the heavenly banquet—the inheritance promised for the faithful. I wish I could have stayed in that baptistery, standing there with my head raised to the ceiling. But I realized that, as beautiful and theologically significant as it was in that place, I needed to continue on my own pilgrimage “from the font to my place on the ceiling.”

The major work of the North American Forum on the Catechumenate included presenting training institutes that focused on the preparation of already baptized but uncatechized adults for the completion of their Christian initiation. (Unfortunately, Forum closed its doors in 2013.) As part of those training institutes, which were attended by RCIA ministers, a reflection session was presented. Its aim was to help those people reflect on their own baptisms in the hope that when ministering to those already baptized folks who were in the RCIA, they would help them appreciate and understand what it means to be baptized into Christ.

As part of the parish missions that I have presented over the past twenty years, I have adapted this reflection session—this cultivation of the rediscovery of the power and potential of baptism—for those who attend the mission. I have found that the vast majority of Roman Catholics have spent little or no time at all during their lives thinking about or reflecting upon their baptism.
These questions should each be followed by periods of reflective silence.

I would like you to think about what it may have been like on the day of your baptism.

If you were able to remember the place where you were baptized, try to place yourself there right now in your imagination.

Think about who was in your parents’ circle of friends and family at that time.

Who would have been present at your baptism? Your parents? Older siblings? Aunts and uncles? Cousins? Grandparents? Great-grandparents? Family, friends, neighbors? The priest or deacon who baptized you?

Now think about your godparents. Some of you will remember them; others may have difficulty recalling them. Just picture your godparents at your baptism.

Would there have been some kind of family tradition that was part of your baptism, perhaps a baptismal garment passed through the generations, perhaps a piece of sacred jewelry . . .

Just spend some time with this picture of your own baptism in your mind . . .

RITUAL OF BAPTISMAL REMEMBRANCE

Now that we have thought deeply about our own baptism, we will enter into a simple ritual of baptismal remembrance.

In a moment, I will be inviting you to come forward to this baptism font (bowl of water) to remember your baptism, to remember the day that changed everything about you because you became an adopted child of God that day. On that day you “put on Christ.”

But before you come forward, I want you to think about the people who loved you so much that they gave you this great gift of your faith. Think about your parents. Think about your godparents. When you come forward to touch this water, please say a prayer of thanksgiving for those who loved you so much.

When you come forward to touch this water, perhaps to make the sign of the cross, you might want to ask the Lord to strengthen you as the beloved son or daughter of God.
The homily, while focusing on the readings of the day, should also include a focus on the sacrament of baptism, and not simply the baptism of N. That homily should help the baptized members of the assembly grow in their appreciation for and understanding of their own baptism—what it means in everyday life to have “put on Christ.” This will not only draw the assembly more deeply into the celebration of the sacrament; it will also be a wonderful moment of catechesis and formation for the couple and family who are presenting their child for baptism.

The celebration of the sacrament continues following the homily, beginning with the intercessions and the Litany of the Saints. The recitation of the Creed is omitted, since all will join in the profession of faith with the parents and godparents. Once the baptism is concluded and the parents or godparents are presented with the lighted baptismal candle, an acclamation is suggested in the Rite of Baptism for Children: “You have put on Christ, in him you have been baptized. Alleluia, alleluia.” In some parishes, the priest or deacon who baptized the child holds the newly baptized child aloft as this acclamation is proclaimed or sung. In other parishes, this acclamation is sung immediately following the pouring of the baptismal water or the immersion of the child into the baptismal pool.

Some parishes offer no opportunities—with very rare exceptions—of “private” baptism; families are invited to choose any appropriate Sunday and any appropriate Mass on the parish schedule for the celebration of their child’s baptism. In large parishes, it can often become the exception, instead of the expected practice, that a weekend Mass does not include the celebration of baptism. Parishioners begin to get used to welcoming these young families. Parishioners see that their parish has new life. Parishioners see that baptism is central to the life of the Church. And most importantly, parishioners continue to appreciate their own baptism into Christ. Through the celebration of the sacrament of the baptism of infants at Sunday Mass, as well as the preaching and teaching that accompany these celebrations, baptismal spirituality continues to be cultivated. One need only watch the delight on the faces of the majority of parishioners in the assembly when the little baby is baptized. Some celebrants invite children
from the assembly to come to the font to witness the baptism. I have often looked into the eyes of very elderly parishioners during these celebrations. I have watched their eyes sparkle as they see a renewed hope for the future of the Church they love so much.

4. The Two Strands of Lent

The second chapter of this book dealt with my own discovery of the “two strands” that make up the Lenten season: the baptismal and the penitential, and how that discovery helped completely reshape my understanding and practice of the Lenten season.