



St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church

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11/28/20

Dear parishioners,

Earlier this year, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued an important [clarification](#) that the sacrament of baptism is not valid if the appropriate prayer for the rite is modified by the celebrant. Specifically, the doctrinal note explained that the modified words “**We baptize** you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” do not convey the sacrament of baptism. Rather, the proper prayer has always been “**I baptize** you...” because it reflects the truth that the sacrament is administered by Our Lord acting through the minister, not through the assembly. In making this clarification, the Congregation cites the Second Vatican Council, which declared no one “may add, remove, or change anything in the liturgy on his own authority.”

Since the Congregation’s announcement, it was recently brought to our attention that a deacon of the Diocese of Dallas – who previously served in the Diocese of Charlotte – used this incorrect wording in some, but not all, of the baptisms he performed in Dallas. Deacon Carl J. Macero, who is now deceased, served at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Charlotte from 1996 to 2004. **While we have no reports that he incorrectly administered the sacrament of baptism here, it must be presumed to be a possibility.** Thus, we are making parishioners aware of the situation so they can act.

Our parish is working to identify and contact those baptized by Deacon Macero so that each individual’s circumstance may be examined and, if necessary, rectified. We are asking that anyone baptized by Deacon Macero review any video or audio recordings of their baptism or that of family members to determine whether the proper formula was used. If incorrect wording was used, the baptism is invalid and the sacrament was not conferred. An invalid baptism also renders subsequent sacraments invalid, including confirmation and possibly matrimony. **Please be assured our parish and diocese are prepared to act swiftly to confer baptism and other sacraments to those affected, either actually or conditionally, and that issues related to marriage can be remedied quickly and without an additional ceremony.**

For those who were baptized by Deacon Macero but have no recordings, it may be necessary to pursue a conditional baptism, which is administered when it is impossible to verify whether an individual has been baptized or there is doubt about the validity of a previous attempt to confer baptism. Subsequent sacraments may also have to be conditionally administered.

We know this news may be unsettling or perceived as a burdensome technicality by some, yet it is an important matter requiring our response. The sacraments entrusted to us by Jesus through the Church are essential and are not subject to redefinition or substantive alteration. They fortify our life of faith and help us along our journey toward the ultimate goal of eternal life. As the first sacrament, baptism brings about adoption into the family of God and places sanctifying grace in the soul, which is necessary in order to spend eternity in heaven.

On behalf of the entire diocese, I am deeply sorry this error has resulted in disruption to the sacramental lives of some members of the faithful. We will take every step necessary to remedy the situation and ask for your help in identifying those possibly affected. **If you believe you were baptized by Deacon Macero, please contact the parish office at (704) 549-1607.** For more information, please see [Frequently Asked Questions](#) published on our website. And in closing, I hope you will join me in praying for those affected by this situation and that by God’s grace we might achieve a smooth resolution.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Father Matthew Codd

FAQs

1. What happened at St. Thomas Aquinas?

Please see the announcement [linked here](#) and posted on our website. In a nutshell, we believe it is possible that the late Deacon Carl J. Macero, who served at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish from 1996 to 2004, might have used incorrect wording while administering some baptisms, thus rendering them invalid. If that is the case, those affected must seek baptism according to the valid formula and possibly receive subsequent sacraments as well.

This recently became an issue after the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith clarified that baptisms administered with the words “**We baptize** you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” instead of “**I baptize** you...” are invalid. This invalid “we baptize” formula was used in the Diocese of Dallas on rare occasions by three deacons including Deacon Macero, so it must be considered a possibility that the same error occurred in baptisms he administered here.

2. Are all baptisms administered by Deacon Macero invalid?

No. Only baptisms in which incorrect wording was used are invalid. Research by the Diocese of Dallas showed incorrect wording was used in some but not all of the baptisms administered by Deacon Macero in his home diocese.

3. Does the wording really matter?

In making its clarification, the Congregation affirms the truth of Christ’s central role in the sacraments: “when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes” and “the Lord has the principal role in the event being celebrated.” In other words, the minister is not performing a communal action among on behalf of many people (“we”) but is performing an action fundamentally by Christ Himself (“I”). Simply put, the minister stands in the place of Christ, and just as there is one Christ, so there is one minister to represent Christ.

Additionally, when Jesus Christ instituted the sacraments He entrusted the Church to preserve and safeguard them. For this reason, no person administering baptism has the authority to modify the sacrament, especially when the change violates the fundamental nature of the sacrament itself.

Read the Vatican’s full explanation here:

<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2020/08/06/0406/00923.html#rispos tein>

4. Can’t the Church just fix this problem without baptizing people again?

No. The Church cannot make the sacrament of baptism valid when it was missing an essential part. In this case, the form of the sacrament (the proper wording) was missing. Individuals affected by this error must now be baptized according to the proper form for the sacrament to be valid.

5. What is being done to fix this?

St. Thomas Aquinas Parish is contacting individuals baptized by Deacon Macero to provide guidelines and next steps. Our parish and the diocese are prepared to act swiftly to validly baptize and immediately administer other sacraments if necessary.

6. What should I do?

If you or your family members were baptized by Deacon Macero, please review any video or audio recordings of the ceremony. If the incorrect wording was used, please contact our parish office at (704) 549-1607 so we can rectify the situation. If you don't have recordings, please contact us so we can consider whether a conditional baptism is warranted.

If you don't know who administered your baptism, no action is necessary; the parish will contact you if records indicate Deacon Macero administered the sacrament.

7. What about other sacraments I received – are they invalid?

Yes. Unfortunately, an invalid baptism means subsequent sacraments are also invalid. Because there are many different scenarios for each individual affected by this, we ask that anyone baptized by Deacon Macero contact the church so we can help examine your circumstances. Please be assured our parish and the Diocese of Charlotte are prepared to act swiftly to confer baptism and other sacraments as needed to those affected.

8. If my baptism is invalid, does that mean my marriage is invalid too?

It is likely that an invalid baptism renders a marriage invalid, yet any issues related to marriage can be remedied quickly and without any additional ceremony. Please note that this error in no way carries any moral guilt for a couple, as neither party could have been aware of the invalidity, and that any children born to an invalid marriage are *not* illegitimate.

9. If my baptism is invalid, am I not a legitimate member of the Church?

Following the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas himself, the Church recognizes that God has bound Himself **to** the sacraments, but He is not bound **by** the sacraments. This means that while we can have certainty that God always works through the sacraments when they are properly conferred, God is not limited by the sacraments and can and does extend His grace in a sovereign way. We can be assured that all those who approached their baptism and subsequent sacraments in good faith received some measure of grace and forgiveness from God. The proper reception of the sacraments as He has entrusted to us gives us a greater degree of confidence in fortifying ourselves on our journey to eternal life.

10. If I was baptized by someone else, should I be worried that it might not be valid?

No. There is no reason for anyone here in our diocese who was not baptized by Deacon Macero to question the validity of their baptisms.

11. How did this happen?

It is not entirely clear when, where or why this improper practice began but a small number of cases are being discovered in dioceses around the country. The wording change was probably well-intentioned even if mistaken, perhaps to suggest a communal spirit at the occasion of an individual's baptism. However, as the Congregation noted, the temptation to modify the sacramental formula "implies a lack of an understanding of the very nature of the ecclesial ministry that is always at the service of God and his people..."

For questions not addressed here, please call our church office at (704) 549-1607.