

Religious ritual as a means of forming values and moral attitudes on the basis of the sacrament of baptism

Rytuał religijny jako środek kształtowania wartości i postaw moralnych
na podstawie sakramentu chrztu świętego

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Abstract: The article presents the religious ritual that is the rite of the sacrament of baptism as a means of forming moral values and attitudes. The purpose of the presented research is an attempt to show the formative character of the baptismal ritual and its communicative character, which become apparent through the analysis of the individual components of the baptismal rite. The synthesis made allows for a better understanding of the individual signs, which evoke the specific content of the Christian message of conversion and call for a more conscious following of the path of faith.

Keywords: religious ritual; baptism; ritual communication; moral theology

Abstrakt: W artykule ukazano rytuał religijny, którym jest obrzęd sakramentu chrztu świętego jako środek kształtowania wartości i postaw moralnych. Celem przedstawionych badań jest próba ukazania formacyjnego charakteru rytuału chrzcielnego oraz jego komunikacyjnego charakteru, które uwidaczniają się poprzez analizę części składowych obrzędu chrzcielnego. Dokonana synteza pozwala na lepsze rozumienie poszczególnych znaków, które przywołują konkretne treści chrześcijańskiego orędzia o nawróceniu i wzywają do bardziej świadomego podążania drogą wiary.

Słowa kluczowe: rytuał religijny; chrzest; komunikacja rytualna; teologia moralna

Introduction

Recent research, particularly in the fields of sociology and anthropology, shows that there is a growing need for ritual in the life of human communities. Certain areas of human life cannot exist without rituals. Through ritual a person can express their identity while moving closer to a deeper understanding of it. Through ritual, people can establish their views, define goals they set for themselves, form communities, recognize their hierarchy of values, and grow closer to God. The communicative capacity of ritual makes it possible to talk about things through symbols that would be difficult to express in ordinary situations (Cooke 2013, 63).

Currently, a wide range of secular rites has developed, marking various areas of human life that used to belong to the religious sphere. This also applies to the sphere of sacraments, the celebration of which is being replaced by various other rituals, such as the baby welcoming ceremony, wedding ritual, or other maturity rituals, which are celebrated, for example, instead of the sacrament of First Communion (Stasiak, Żyśko 2022, 35).

Thus, there is a need to draw attention to religious rites, the celebration of which may open an individual to the *sacred*. This is especially true of the celebration of the Holy Sacraments, which allow us to experience the presence and action of the Triune God, the meaning and value of which are increasingly marginalized.

This study aims to show that the celebration of the sacrament of baptism is a religious ritual that effectively forms moral values and attitudes. To achieve this stated goal, the issue of religious ritual against the background of rituals in general will firstly be discussed. Then the issue of ritual communication during the celebration of the sacrament will be addressed, as well as the meaning of the various parts of the rite of baptism and their moral dimension.

I. Religious ritual – an attempt to define the issue

When trying to define the concept of ritual¹, we encounter a number of issues that arise either from the represented branch of science or the context of considerations taken into account. An anthropologist of culture, a sociologist or

¹ Henryk Zimoń suggests using the term “rituals” as an overarching term that includes all symbolic activities. Rituals can be: (a) religious, i.e., relating to the sphere of “the sacred”, and oriented towards it; (b) secular, i.e., relating to the profane. The former can be called “rites,” while the latter can be called “ceremonies,” (cf. Zimoń 1997, 183-190). Without going deeper into the interrelationships between the sacred and profane rites and their mutual osmosis, the terms “ritual” and “rite” will be used interchangeably in this study, especially with respect to the liturgy of the sacraments.

psychologist, and a theologian would all offer different definitions of a ritual. In an attempt to overcome this definition-oriented difficulty, J.J. Pawlik states that ritual itself belongs to an analytical category, and it is more important to define its characteristic features than to provide a specific definition. This allows us to see ritual as an orderly, highly-formalized activity, without practical purpose, but with a symbolic and codified meaning (Pawlik 2011, 12).

Understood in such a way, the concept of ritual is broadly applicable. It allows us to define a range of human activities performed in everyday life, during family celebrations and national festivities, not to mention religious events. In this perspective, ritual touches both the realm of the *profane* and the *sacred*.

A believer values the latter, which is referred to as religious ritual. According to W. Piwowarski, it is “a symbolic activity that enables a subject or multiple subjects, by means of objects of experience oriented to the sacred, to articulate and express meaning, and consequently to provide a holistic perspective to everyday life” (Piwowarski 1983, 39).

Researchers of the phenomenon distinguish between three types of religious rituals. The first includes the rituals of the church year, the second concerns rituals associated with the reception of the holy sacraments, and the third are sacramentals. The rituals of the church year include those that are recurring and occur every year, as well as those that occur sporadically. Also, the scope of these rituals varies. They can be divided into church, local, and family ceremonies. Church rituals include, among others, Christmas, Easter, Lent, and the Solemnity of the Corpus Christi. Local rituals are those observed in specific regions or communities, e.g., caroling or customs related to Easter Monday in Poland. The last category relates to the family home and the celebration of various religious ceremonies that take place within families, such as the Christmas Eve meal. The second group of religious rituals is related to celebrating the holy sacraments. Here we can distinguish between ecclesiastical and religious-cultic rituals. The former are celebrated in accordance with church-liturgical regulations, while the latter are based on local customs, for example, baptism, weddings, and consolation (Piwowarski 1983, 26-27; Nowakowski 2010, 233-235).

There are seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, anointing of the sick, the sacrament of holy orders, and matrimony. Theology emphasizes that Christ instituted all the sacraments, and their reception enables the birth and development of the life of faith (Bartnik 2000, 33-37).

The third group of religious rituals is sacramentals. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “Sacramentals are instituted for the sanctification of certain ministries of the Church, certain states of life, a great variety of circumstances in Christian life, and the use of many things helpful to man.

In accordance with bishops' pastoral decisions, they can also respond to the needs, culture, and special history of the Christian people of a particular region or time. They always include a prayer, often accompanied by a specific sign, such as the laying on of hands, the sign of the cross, or the sprinkling of holy water" (*Katechizm Kościoła katolickiego* 1994, 1668).

2. The communicative nature of ritual in sacramental celebration

Turning our attention to the rituals involved in the celebration of the sacraments, it should be noted that modern Catholic sacramentology emphasizes the communicative nature of the sacraments. They are presented as a verbal and non-verbal communication system through which a believer can contact God. A sacramental ritual allows not only for development of reflections on communication with God but reveals the sacrament itself as the most perfect way of proclaiming salvation offered by God and, at the same time, the possibility of man's response to God (Janiec 2007, 65-66).

Celebration of the sacramental liturgy is carried out in accordance with the regulations established by the Catholic Church, both legally and liturgically. The idea behind it is to preserve not only unity with the Church but, above all, the rules regarding the performance of the ritual throughout the community. Such an attitude is presented in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, which states that regulation of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church, for liturgical services are not private functions but are celebrations of the Church. In addition, the document encourages its readers to celebrate the sacraments in the presence of the faithful, for the communal celebration of the ritual has priority over a celebration that is individual and quasi-private. A noble simplicity should distinguish the rites; they should be short, clear, and unencumbered by useless repetitions, be within the people's powers of comprehension, and normally should not require much explanation. (Sobór Watykański II 1963, 22-34).

Thus, the distinctive feature of ritual, its communicative aspect, becomes apparent. Every ritual, including religious ones, consists of signs, gestures, symbols and formulas. They become a form of communication through which a person communicates their inner world to others (Szafranski 1988, 13-15).

As E.W. Rothenbuhler points out, rituals are a form of expression. They are similar to a book that is read and provides specific information. Gestures, signs, and formulas that make up a ritual have a material meaning and perform a communicative function (express something). If they do not perform such a function, they are not rituals (Rothenbuhler 2003, 73-74).

In sociological terms, a ritual's ability to create social order is an important dimension. In its communicative capacity, ritual affects society, creates it, and sustains it in a certain condition. Also, it can potentially transform a particular social state and phenomena that occur within it (Rothenbuhler 2003, 75).

Thus, the capacity to transform belongs to the functional dimension of ritual, which also touches upon the religious sphere. According to M. Sroczyńska, this functionality has vertical and horizontal dimensions. On the one hand, it deepens the relationship with God, and on the other hand, it allows for proper social integration and the adoption of axionormative attitudes (Sroczyńska 2011, 172).

Thus a ritual contains an important formative element for the ecclesial community. Some researchers point out that the Catholic Church in Poland pays a lot of attention to religious rituals and influences its faithful through ritual, especially when sacraments are administered. Sometimes ritual plays a greater role than the doctrine itself, enabling individuals to identify with the community and shape it on various levels. In Christianity, it also boosts moral transformation by deepening the relationship with God in the rite. The moral transformation has an individual and social dimension. It applies to the life of individuals and specific communities and is not just about adopting a particular moral code but allows one to build a deeper relationship with God (Piwowarski 1983, 62).

3. Moral dimension of the rite of baptism

The first of the sacraments received by an individual is the sacrament of baptism. It is the first sacrament of the new law in which the mystery of eternal life is opened to the one who receives it. It is a sacrament of faith, through which an individual responds to the call of the Gospel. It cleanses sins and incorporates an individual into the community of the Church (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults 4-5).

The rite of baptism itself, to which Christian initiation is related, can be categorized among rites of passage (*rites de passage*), which French ethnographer A. van Gennep defines as "ritual sequences that accompany a transition from one state to another, from one world (in cosmic or social terms) to another" (Gennep 2006, 37).

In Poland, baptism is usually administered to children. It is a ritual that very clearly marks the aforementioned transition and initiation. On the one hand, it sacralizes an individual's entry into the world and sets them on a new path in which they acquire the rights and duties of a Christian, opening them to

the reality of the *sacred*. Thanks to baptism, an individual begins to belong to the community of the Church, which at the moment of baptism is represented by parents, godparents, and a priest, who is an official representative of the institution of the Church. On the other hand, in social terms, it signifies obtaining a name and inclusion in a new national community. Baptism marks a new stage in a believer's life: a process of religious education that is supposed to lead to the realization of the tasks flowing from this sacrament (Mariański 1988, 105-107).

A characteristic feature of the sacraments, including the sacrament of baptism, is that during their administration, people enter the realm of symbols. The baptismal liturgy is structured around the symbolism of water, to which the symbolism of oil (anointing) and light (flame, white robes) have been added over time (Masłowski 2009, 100). Knowledge of this symbolism allows one to penetrate the essence of the ritual and highlights its formative dimension. At the present moment, both in catechetical and pastoral practice, there is a pressing need to emphasize the importance of symbols² in the sacramental celebration so that their meaning becomes clearer.

In the baptismal liturgy of both the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* and *the Rite of Baptism of Children*, which are two parts of the Roman Ritual, several symbols and gestures carrying a specific moral message can be distinguished. For believers, they take the form of an imperative.

3.1. The sign of the cross

The sign of the cross is made on a child's forehead by a celebrant, parents, and godparents in the rite of acceptance into the community of the Church. This baptismal ritual has been preserved since the 4th century. Of military origin, it derives from the marking of soldiers' foreheads with a sign of affiliation to their commander. In liturgy, it signifies belonging to Christ and inclusion in the community of the Church (Potrzebowski 2017, 55).

Being marked with the sign of the cross during baptism testifies to Christian identity. In his baptism catechesis, Pope Francis notes that "the cross is

² When using the term "symbol," one should be aware of the relationship between the terms "sign" and "symbol." According to A. Durak, "The difference between a sign and a symbol is as follows: not every sign is a symbol, but every symbol is a sign. Each sign signifies a thing and speaks of a relation to that thing, although the signifying reality of the sign, if it does not specify the thing in question, has no value in itself. A symbol, on the other hand, is a reality existing in its own right. It has its own value, even if accidental. It is always a sign – whether an arbitrary or established one. It has a more mysterious character than a sign, thus it is very well connected to the religious sphere, hence in the liturgy it is more common to speak of a symbol than of a sign." (Durak 2001, 117-124).

a badge that shows who we are: our speaking, thinking, looking, acting exists under the sign of the cross, that is, Jesus' love until the end. Children are marked on their foreheads. Adult catechumens receive the sign of the cross as well, on their sense organs, accompanied by the following words: "Receive the sign of the cross on your ears, that you may hear the voice of the Lord.>"; "Receive the sign of the cross on your eyes, that you may see the glory of God"; "Receive the sign of the cross on your lips, that you may respond to the Word of God"; "Receive the sign of the cross over your heart, that Christ may dwell there by faith"; "Receive the sign of the cross on your shoulders, that you may bear the gentle yoke of Christ." We become Christians to the extent that the cross is imprinted in us as a 'paschal' sign, showing, also externally, the Christian way of passing through life" (Francis 2018a).

Marking the forehead with the sign of the cross carries specific religious and social consequences. S. Czerwik points to two such effects, stressing that belonging to Christ and the community of the Church, which the symbol signifies, should entail a change of conduct expressed in breaking with everything that does not correspond to Christian dignity, as well as taking responsibility for the impact on one's environment (Czerwik 1981, 60-61).

Thus in this simple gesture, the ritual of baptism communicates the need to build a relationship with Christ and the Church. It does not apply only to a baptized person but also to those who participate in the rite of the sacrament, indicating the need to live in sanctifying grace. At the same time, the aspect of responsibility for society becomes apparent here, which is expressed in giving an authentic Christian witness and counteracting scandals, which from the moral side should be defined as inappropriate talk, deeds, words, and abandoning, which can lead to loss of salvation by a neighbour (Ćmiel 2008, 469).

3.2. Prayer with exorcism and laying on of hands

One of the components of the rite of baptism is a prayer with an exorcism and laying on of hands. Exorcism is a prayer "When the Church asks publicly and authoritatively in the name of Jesus Christ that a person or object be protected against the power of the Evil One and withdrawn from his dominion" (*Katechizm Kościoła katolickiego* 1994, 1673). In a simple form, exorcism is performed at the celebration of baptism. This is the so-called baptismal exorcism. A solemn exorcism, called "a major exorcism," can only be performed by a priest and with the bishop's permission (*Katechizm Kościoła katolickiego* 1994, 1673).

Performing exorcisms is an expression of the sanctifying function of the Church, which believes in the existence of Satan but also in the possibility of set-

ting people free from his influence through the power of Christ and the redemption offered by the Lord. In exorcism, the power of the prayer of the Church that prays in the name of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit is manifested. The Church has the power to command evil spirits to leave a possessed person and surrender to God, the authority over the world (Krakowiak 2015, 28).

A simple exorcism is performed during the baptismal liturgy for both infants and adults. At the baptism of infants, a prayer with exorcism and the laying on of hands is performed (*Obrzędy chrztu dzieci* 2020, 20). Significantly, this rite takes place only when the sacrament of baptism is administered by a clergyman. When baptism is performed by a lay person, the rite in question is omitted (*Obrzędy chrztu dzieci* 2020, 20; Stawski 2008, 144).

In the case of the baptism of adults, exorcism is undertaken during the catechumenate period, which is composed of three parts. There is no specific indication of the location of exorcism (or exorcisms, as there may be more than one) during the catechumenate period. However, attention is drawn to the celebrant of this rite. It should be undertaken by a deacon, priest, or a layperson, such as a catechist, authorized by their bishop (*Obrzędy chrześcijańskiego wtajemniczenia dorosłych* 2020, 109-112; Stawski 2008, 28).

The meaning of exorcism is explained in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, stating that exorcisms are meant to show “the true face of spiritual life, a struggle between flesh and spirit, importance of renunciation for gaining happiness of the kingdom of God and a constant necessity of God’s help” (*Obrzędy chrześcijańskiego wtajemniczenia dorosłych* 2020, 101).

Pope Francis draws the faithful’s attention to the moral aspect of the gesture, focusing on the need to pray, especially for freedom from everything that hinders a person’s union with God. Moreover, the baptismal exorcism teaches believers about the need to constantly fight sin and ward off temptation since Christians are exposed to the temptation to turn away from God and turn to earthly enticements, through which Satan wants to become the master of their heart (Francis 2018c, 27-28).

3.3. Pouring water

Another sacramental sign of baptism is the pouring of water. Historically, the ritual involved immersion in water, although nowadays, the former form is usually preferred. Pouring or immersion in water “is related to the functional activity of washing oneself, and alludes to the rituals of purification (mikvah) in the Jewish religion. The ritual introduced by John the Baptist was primarily related to washing of sins, which tackled the priestly monopoly in Judaism. Jesus sub-

mitted to the ritual, and this, according to the Gospel narrative, caused the Holy Spirit to descend upon him (cf. Matthew 3:13-17)” (Masłowski 2009, 104).

The water used for washing is full of symbolism that can be traced back in Israel’s history to the crossing of the Red Sea during the flight from Egypt. A person who converted to Judaism, i.e., a proselyte, would take a ritual bath. Passing through water entailed accepting the principles, including moral principles, of Judaism. John’s baptism, received by Jesus, signified a decision to live according to the covenant between God and men. For Jesus himself, it was a sign of acceptance of the Father’s will for death and resurrection. Thus, the symbolism of baptism expresses immersion in death and resurrection. Man immerses himself in water as a sign of death and emerges from it as a sign of resurrected life (Cooke 2013, 209-210).

From the theological point of view, the gesture symbolises washing, cleansing from original sin and all other sins, and the transition from the death of sin to the life of grace. It has a strong communicative meaning, not in “the power of spoken words or persuasion, but in the participants’ belief that extra-natural forces are capable of providing these goods” (Pawlik 2011, 15).

Properly understanding the symbolism of this gesture allows its participants in the ritual to recognize key truths of a moral nature. The first one is a call for new life symbolized by water. A life of grace begins when someone’s sins are washed away. As Benedict XVI pointed out, “by being bathed in the water, [...] children are inserted into the life of Jesus, who died on the cross to free us from sin, and rising, conquered death. So, spiritually immersed in his death and resurrection, [these children] are freed from original sin and in them the life of grace begins, which is the very life of the risen Jesus” (Benedict XVI 2011, 17).

The new life in Christ is closely linked to the gift of freedom. A person freed from sin is called to live a life of freedom and act and behave in a different and better way. This otherness stems from an awareness of salvation and the discovery of a new existence, which implies better conduct expressed in words, followed by Christ-centred behavior. Such a person’s behaviour is marked with Christocentrism. It presupposes the New Law that is internal and allows for the transformation of the person’s innermost parts, not just the external fulfillment of moral principles (Nagórny 2011, 35-39).

The second meaning of being bathed in the water is expressed in the desire for love. Christ’s willingness to go through death expresses love for man and the world. Immersion in the baptismal water signifies the desire of the recipient to realize the same love. This love is realized in the desire to make a sacrifice, for the willingness to love our neighbours as Christ did is the essence of the baptismal mission (Cooke 2013, 210).

The sacrificial dimension gets completed by the desire for imitation, which stems from an attitude of faith. Hence the connection between faith and baptism, which accentuates the dialogical dimension of Christian morality, is so significant. In the context of faith, an individual's life is a dialogue with God, a response to his Word, and a constant (*continuum*) desire to respond. This *continuum* is accomplished through love. It is expressed in relation to the other person, the whole community and the world, finding its foundation in the Triune God (Nagórny 2011, 34).

The third meaning of the gesture of pouring water is the gift of the Holy Spirit as the source and promise of eternal life. The Risen Lord shares all this by giving His Spirit. This pneumatological dimension has always been emphasized in the Christian tradition. Administering the Holy Spirit is the centerpiece of the baptismal liturgy. He is the author of the ontic newness of the Christian life, expressed through the realization of Christian morality. Moreover, the Holy Spirit expresses the relationship between Jesus and the Father. It reveals God's identity and love for people, which should be taken up and realized by a Christian (Cooke 2013, 211).

3.4. Anointing with the holy oil

The gesture of anointing with the holy oil belongs to the explanatory rites. In the first centuries of Christianity, oil itself was used. It was first called "oil of the catechumens" in connection with the prayer of exorcism recited at the anointing meant to expel Satan. It was not until the 4th century that this oil became known as the chrism, signifying Christ, and from the 5th century, a fragrant balm began to be added to it during the rite of consecration. The mixture of these two ingredients symbolizes the mystery of the Incarnation, while the anointing with the chrism symbolizes man's participation in the deity of Christ. The anointing with beautifully scented oil was meant to encourage Christians to give off a pleasant fragrance to God in their life. Gradually, the thought of casting out Satan became secondary in the liturgy. At the same time, the focus was shifted to an individual's sanctification and the Holy Spirit's dwelling in them (Sinka 1997, 84-85).

In the present day, the anointing at baptism is meant to symbolize receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This gesture cannot be detached from the rite as a whole since the action of the Holy Spirit is visible throughout the rite, but the anointing directly emphasizes the said gifts (Cooke 2013, 212).

The baptismal rites of both children and adults emphasize the mission to which the Holy Spirit predisposes. The mission itself is embedded in the incorporation into the people of God and the assumption of a prophetic, priestly and royal mission (*Obrzędy chrztu dzieci* 2020, 62; *Obrzędy chrześcijańskiego*

wtajemniczenia dorosłych 2020, 263). Thus it refers to the Old Testament custom of anointing prophets, priests and kings. The anointing is therefore administered to encourage the realization of Christ's threefold authority, which is defined by the conciliar *tria munera Christi*, meaning, on the one hand, "task" and then "ability" to fulfill. For the moral life, royal authority is vital, meaning overcoming the dominion of sin within oneself. It gives Christian morality its proper character, not limiting it solely to ethical correctness, but showing its relationality and dialogical, as well as its soteriological character (Gryz 2020, 129).

The specific goals of the royal mission are shown by John Paul II, who states that the baptismal anointing applies to all Christians "they are called by him to spread that Kingdom in history. They exercise their kingship as Christians, above all in the spiritual combat in which they seek to overcome in themselves the kingdom of sin (cf. Rom 6:12) and then to make a gift of themselves to serve, in justice and charity, Jesus who is himself present in all his brothers and sisters, above all in the very least. But in particular, the lay faithful are called to restore all its original value to creation. In ordering creation to the authentic well-being of humanity in an activity governed by the life of grace, they share in the exercise of the power with which the Risen Christ draws all things to himself and subjects them along with himself to the Father so that God might be everything to everyone" (Jan Paweł II 1988, 14).

3.5. Clothing with a white garment

The anointing with the chrism in the rite of baptism is followed by the clothing with a white robe. In Poland, in the case of the baptism of children, it is recommended that the robe be white – other colors are not allowed³. The liturgical regulations indicate that the vestments should be brought by the families themselves (*Obrzędy chrztu dzieci* 2020, 64).

In some areas of Tešín Silesia, there is a ritual of "nowiecki," that is, visiting a child who has just been born. On this occasion, small gifts are brought – the person who has been chosen as godmother brings a white robe as one of these gifts.

In the case of the baptism of adults, the regulations specify that the robe may be of a color other than white, as long as it is in line with local customs. The regulations also emphasize that the neophyte is to be clothed in the garment by his or her godparent, while in some cases, the entirety of this rite may

³ It seems appropriate to emphasize the need to give a white robe in pastoral practice, as modern culture is beginning to promote other solutions. Robes of various colors are made with various inscriptions and of assorted designs, which sometimes do not correspond with Christian values.

be omitted if appropriate circumstances warrant it (*Obrzędy chrześcijańskiego wtajemniczenia dorosłych* 2020, 264).

In the first centuries of Christianity, in the era of baptism of adults at Easter, the newly baptized took off their robes and put on white robes and wore them throughout the Paschal octave. Sometimes the white robe had a red trim to emphasize that the sacrament of baptism is immersion in the Blood of Christ. This practice was meant to emphasize the symbolism of the sign, which was better understood then than it is today (Czerwik 1981, 65).

Today, the white robe takes on a different visual form, but its symbolism remains. It is contained in what the first centuries of Christianity referred to as the “robe of innocence” or “heavenly robe.” It signifies a new creation, clothing in Christ, the dignity of a child of God and immaculateness (Lijka 2002, 118).

This is why its importance for the moral life, which concerns two aspects, should be emphasized. The first aspect is a commitment not to lose the sanctifying grace one receives, while the second one points to the eschatological dimension of baptism, which concerns participation in the wedding feast, which cannot be attended without proper attire (Czerwik 1981, 66).

The ritual presentation of the white robe, as Pope Francis states in his catechesis on baptism, expresses symbolically what has been accomplished in baptism. This sacrament calls for the transformation that should take place in the baptized person, who from now on should develop virtues such as compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and above all the virtue of love (Francis 2018b, 26).

The presentation of the white robe also has a very clear community-building character. This is demonstrated by the words spoken by the celebrant, who calls on the loved ones of the baptized person to commit to preserving in him or her the dignity of a child of God. This should be done through word and example of life. What is characteristic of the quoted text is its attention to relatives: it is no longer just the parents and godparents but the entire community that is meant to help to develop the fruits of the analyzed sacrament (*Obrzędy chrztu dzieci* 2020, 64).

3.6. Lighted candle

The handing of a lighted candle was introduced into the rite of baptism relatively late. It has been a part of the ritual since the 12th century. One simply cannot fail to link this gesture to the ancient understanding of baptism as *illumination* (*illuminatio*), which is how the transformation that took place in the baptized person, thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit, was described. The baptized individual is filled with the light of Christ (Czerwik 1981, 68-69).

An appropriate reading of the rite's moral implications is supported by the symbolism of the lit candle. A clear parallel to the parable of the ten virgins springs immediately to mind. In a spiritual sense, to keep the candle flame lit means to be prepared for the coming of the Lord. This preparation implies cultivating a state of sanctifying grace, accomplished by living a virtuous life in accordance with God's law (Syczewski 2016, 45).

Pope Francis emphasizes the depth of this ritual sign, noting that the Christian vocation is expressed in the conduct of a child of light. It signifies the living presence of Christ, which needs to be guarded, defended, and cared for in its continuous development. This light should eventually become a lamp, illuminating our steps, guiding us to act properly, and encouraging us to help our neighbor achieve union with Christ (Francis 2018b, 27).

This allows us to see the essential meaning of the gesture as the continuity of faith, evidenced by the words spoken during the presentation of the candle: "Receive the light of Christ" (*Obrzędy chrztu dzieci* 2020, 65). The flame of the candle is the light of Christ himself. The act of lighting the baptismal candle from the paschal candle alludes to the Paschal vigil and the fact that the paschal candle is a symbol of Christ as the light of the world. A baptized person should uphold this light, which is the light of faith. One should remember that by receiving the sacrament of baptism, one enters into the procession of faith, receiving a deposit from the Church, which must be taken care of. This is the task of a lifetime and does not just involve the acquisition of the deposit but also the duty of bringing the light of faith to the world to lead it out of darkness (Cooke 2013, 213).

Benedict XVI pointed out the hermeneutic nature of the handing over of candlelight at baptism. He emphasized that the handing over of the candle allows us to understand the sacrament as an encouragement to moral action. As Christians, we allow ourselves to be enlightened by the mystery of Christ in order to experience liberation. Sometimes, however, the flame grows dim and needs to be fueled by practicing deeds of love toward neighbors and through sincere prayer. These two practices influence our life of faith and shape our conduct (Benedict XVI 2011b, 52).

The lit candle is thus a symbol of standing firm in faith that should be experienced in life. It shows in the process of ritual communication, on the one hand, the duty to help parents and godparents keep the faith, which is made evident in the rite of the sacrament of baptism of children (*Obrzędy chrztu dzieci* 2020, 65). On the other hand, at the baptism of adults, it obliges an individual to abide in faith, develop and defend it, so that it will enable him or her to meet the saints in heaven (*Obrzędy chrześcijańskiego wtajemniczenia dorosłych* 2020, 265).

Conclusion

Religious ritual, which is the rite of the sacrament of baptism, has a very clear formative impact and allows for the transmission of moral values and attitudes. It has two dimensions: an indicative and an imperative one. On the one hand, it allows us to read the dogmatic richness of the sacrament, and on the other, to shape the personality and moral-spiritual attitude of those who receive and participate in it (Zadykowicz 2020, 54).

To understand its meaning and value more deeply, it is necessary to look at the baptismal ritual as a form of both verbal and non-verbal communication. The communicative content of the ritual and its effect on the moral life are possible through a proper understanding of the various symbols present in the ritual. Very often, they are considered integrally, emphasizing the role and effects of the sacrament itself, but it is worth paying attention to the rite itself and considering each element of the ritual separately. This allows for their better understanding, and showing the historical context deepens their content.

Moreover, in the context of contemporary deliberations on ritual, it is vital to appreciate and rediscover religious rites. Sometimes restoration of their proper meaning in the lives of believers seems necessary. It appears to be essential that Christians who receive the sacraments should not become mere passive spectators of the rituals, but their fully engaged participants, who draw from their richness and encounter God Himself through them.

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