

REV. PIOTR KULBACKI

THE SYMBOLISM OF WATER IN THE LITURGY OF THE CATECHUMENATE

Abstract. The liturgy preparing for receiving the sacraments of Christian initiation is dominated by the issue of a covenant, a new life, enlightenment, inclusion in the Church. Liturgical ceremonies preparing for establishing a covenant in baptismal waters mention the symbolism of water. However, this is not the main theme. The study on the liturgical texts used in the period of purification and enlightenment revealed references to the symbolism of water taken from both the Old Testament and the New Testament. It concerns the living water in the desert and the prophetic message of purification. Also, some of the psalms used in the liturgical rites of this period refer to using water for purification or confirmation of innocence. The liturgy draws attention to the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman and the promise of the water giving eternal life, and the blind from birth who regained his sight through washing. The symbolism of water is further developed during the rite of blessing of baptismal water and baptism in the Paschal Night. Preparation for baptism fulfils the principle of mystagogy, which assumes the priority of the celebration of the sign over its explanation.

Key words: water; washing; scrutinies; baptism; mystagogy.

The Church, restoring the catechumenate after Vaticanum II,¹ referred to the symbolism of water and washing with it in the liturgical rites which prepare candidates for baptism.² The issue of primary importance is the one concentrated on seeking the answer to the question how catechumens are

Rev. Prof. Dr. hab. PIOTR KULBACKI—Department of History of Liturgy at the Institute of Liturgy and Homiletics at the Faculty of Theology of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin; address for correspondence: Al. Raławickie 14, 20–950 Lublin; E-mail: PiotrKulbacki@oaza.pl

Ks. dr hab. PIOTR KULBACKI, prof. KUL – Katedra Historii Liturgii w Instytucie Liturgiki i Homiletyki na Wydziale Teologii KUL; adres do korespondencji: Al. Raławickie 14, 20–950 Lublin; e-mail: PiotrKulbacki@oaza.pl

¹ Cf. Czesław KRAKOWIAK, *Katechumenat chrzcielny dorosłych w Kościele posoborowym* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2003), 36.

² Cf. Kazimierz ROMANIUK, *Sakramentologia biblijna: Zarys teologii sakramentów dla teologów, katechetów, duszpasterzy* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Salezjańskie, 1994), 7–23.

introduced into this symbolism even before the Paschal Night during which the baptismal washing with water is the first and at the same time the fundamental experience of the physical water sign. This article presents the results of the study on the liturgical texts used in the period during which candidates are prepared for baptism. The aforementioned texts are based on the rites of the Christian adult initiation and the corresponding formularies of ritual masses contained in the new typical edition of the Missal.³

1. THE FIRST PERIOD OF THE CATECHUMENATE

1.1. The rite of acceptance into the catechumenate⁴ begins with the greetings of the candidates, their sponsors and friends. Then it is followed by singing, for example, Psalm 63[62],⁵ a lamentation in which there is the symbolism of water (cf. Ps 63[62]:1–9). The psalmist, with all his essence—flesh and soul—longs for God, comparing his thirst to the parched land waiting for water to become life-giving (cf. Ps 63[62]:2). The fact that the psalm was written in the Desert of Judah, the sun-scorched land, highlights the symbolism of water, the absence of which causes death.⁶ The theme of a thirst for water is also known from other psalms (e.g. Ps 42:3; 143:6).⁷

The other elements of the rite of acceptance into the catechumenate⁸ together with the indicated readings from the liturgy of the word, which should explicitly refer to catechumens,⁹ do not refer to the symbolism of water but they revolve around the sign of the cross and a presentation of a book of the Gospels.¹⁰

³ *Ordo initiationis christianae adutorum*, Editio typica (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1972) [hereinafter referred to as OICA]; *In conferendis sacramentis initiationis christianae*, in *Missale Romanum*, Editio typica. Reimpressio emendata (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 2008), 971–986 [hereinafter referred to as MR]. The norms of the liturgical calendar regulate the use of formularies; cf. MR 970.

⁴ OICA 69.

⁵ Cf. *Księga Psalmów. Wstęp – przekład z oryginału – komentarz – ekskursy*, ed. S Łach (Poznań: Pallottinum 1990), 303.

⁶ Cf. Gianfranco RAVASI, *Psalmy, Cz. 2: Psalmy 22–68 (wybór)* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo “Salwator,” 2007), 514.

⁷ Cf. *Księga Psalmów*, 304.

⁸ Cf. OICA 75–90.

⁹ Cf. OICA 92, 93, 372.

¹⁰ Cf. Cz. KRAKOWIAK, *Katechumenat chrzcielny*, 300.

1.2. At the first step of the catechumenate, baptismal candidates participate in the gatherings where the liturgy of the word is celebrated, the exorcisms are performed, and the blessings are bestowed onto them.¹¹ This is essentially a longer time of formation, shaping the Christian lifestyle.¹² Among the suggested blessings, the two texts refer to the prophesied purifying washing with water as a baptismal figure. The first of the blessings consists of the prayer: „*Deus, qui per sanctos prophetas tuos accedentibus ad te nuntiasti «Lavamini, mundi estote», et per Christum spiritualem regenerationem disposuisti [...]*.”¹³ A similar thought is included in the other blessing: „*respice servos tuos catechumenos [...]: dignos fac ipsos lavacro regenerationis [...]*.”¹⁴

2. THE PERIOD OF PURIFICATION AND ENLIGHTENMENT

2.1. The mass formulary *Pro electione seu inscriptione nominis* has no direct reference to the symbolism of water.¹⁵ At the rite of the election taking place on the First Sunday of Lent or on another day, this symbol appears only in the liturgy of the word of this Sunday in the Cycle A and B readings.¹⁶

In the Cycle A, the responsorial psalm containing the request for the Lord's mercy over sinners is based on the penitent lament—Psalm 51[50]. The Psalmist begs God to cleanse him from his sin through washing away his guilt (cf. Ps 51[50]:4). This text of the Church tradition refers, among others, to baptism. Such an interpretation is confirmed by psalmist's further request, who says a similar prayer (not used in this responsorial psalm) asking for sprinkling him with hyssop so that he can be clean and washing him so that he can be whiter than snow (cf. Ps 51[50]:9).¹⁷

¹¹ Cf. OICA 100–102, 106–12.

¹² Cf. Bronisław MOKRZYCKI, *Droga wtajemniczenia chrześcijańskiego* (Warszawa: Akademia Teologii Katolickiej, 1983), 113–15.

¹³ OICA 122.

¹⁴ OICA 374.

¹⁵ Cf. MR 971–72.

¹⁶ Cf. OICA 141.

¹⁷ Cf. *Księga Psalmów*, 272–73; Gerhard VON RAD, *Teologia Starego Testamentu*, trans. Bogusław Widła (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX, 1986), 302; see Antoni TRONINA, *Teologia Psalmów: Wprowadzenie do lektury Psalterza* (Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, 1996), 117–45.

The Cycle B readings contain direct reference to baptismal water. The text of Genesis shows the establishment of the covenant after the flood (cf. Gen 9:8–15). In the pericope from the first Epistle of St. Peter we can read about water saving those who took refuge in the ark as a type of washing in the waters of baptism (cf. 1 Pet 3:18–22).¹⁸

2.2. In the period of purification and enlightenment the major role is played by scrutinies¹⁹ and ritual masses *In scrutinis peragendis* showing the symbolism of water and washing.²⁰

In the Old Testament perspective, the mass formulary connected with the first scrutiny contains two entrance antiphons. The first one refers to the eschatological perspective shown by the prophet Ezekiel (cf. Ez 36:23–26). God's purpose is to honour His name and make the nations worship Him; the people of God remain in the background (cf. Ez 36:32).²¹ God will reveal his holiness through gathering the people living among the heathen and bringing them into the land destined for them. God promises through the prophet Ezekiel that by pouring water he will cleanse his people from the sin of idolatry and will give them new heart and new spirit. The prophecy of purifying washing with water is supplemented by the idea, not included in the antiphon, of removing the heart of stone and replacing it with the heart of flesh.²² The antiphon presents these images as follows: *Cum sanctificatus fuero in vobis, congregabo vos de universis terris; et effundam super vos aquam mundam, et mundabimini ab omnibus inquinamentis vestris. Et dabo vobis spiritum novum, dicit Dominus.*²³

The other antiphon based on the prophet Isaiah's text (cf. Isa 55:1) says about giving water to thirsty man by selfless God. Man is invited to come and drink, though he has nothing to pay. This situation cannot be a source of humiliation, but of joy from Lord's gift. The picture of the feast often appears in the Bible as a symbol of God's concern for Israel, among others, in the context of the Passover (cf. Ex 12), the covenant established in Sinai

¹⁸ Cf. William J. DALTON, "Pierwszy List Świętego Piotra," in *Katolicki komentarz biblijny*, ed. Raymond Edward Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland Edmund Murphy; for Polish edition: Waldemar Chrostowski and Krzysztof Bardski (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza "Vocatio," 2001), 1509–10.

¹⁹ Cf. OICA 25; see B. MOKRZYCKI, *Droga wtajemniczenia*, 132–34.

²⁰ Cf. MR 973–77

²¹ Cf. *Pismo Święte Starego i Nowego Testamentu*, ed. Michał Peter and Marian Wolniewicz, vol. 2 (Poznań: Księgarnia Św. Wojciecha, 1984), 1128.

²² Cf. Lawrence BOADT, "Księga Ezechiela," in *Katolicki komentarz biblijny*, 771.

²³ MR 973.

(cf. Ex 24:5.11) or the abundance of the new age available to every human being, also the poor (cf. Isa 25:6; 65:11–15).²⁴ The missal presents this thought as follows: *Sitientes, venite ad aquas, dicit Dominus; et qui non habetis pretium, venite, et bibite cum laetitia.*²⁵

In the discussed formulary, the liturgical texts are taken from the Third Sunday of Lent (the Cycle A).²⁶ The first one contains reference to travelling through the desert when the people murmured against Moses and demanded water that would satisfy their thirst. At God's command, Moses brought water out of the rock (cf. Ex 17:3–7). The issue of the people's despair is reflected in the responsorial psalm containing God's call not to harden their hearts against Lord's works (cf. Ps 95[94]). The Psalm is a prophetic call to worship God and admonishes the people not to reject His words (cf. 95 [94]:7c–8a).²⁷ The church aims this call at believers in the daily *Invitatorium* of the Liturgy of the Hours.²⁸

2.3. In the New Testament perspective, the first scrutiny focuses on Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman.²⁹ Satisfying thirsty people heading for the Promised Land by giving them water brought out of the rock (cf. Ex 17:1–7) is the figure of the living water about which Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman (cf. Jn 4:5–42). The conversation revolves around satisfying man's thirst.³⁰ Jesus asked the woman at the well to give him water to drink, which was against the habit of forbidding contacts with the Samaritans.³¹ Drinking from a mug given by a Samaritan woman violated ritual purity rules. The most crucial moment was the Jesus' declaration of giving the water, which would become in those who would drink it a spring of water welling up to eternal life (cf. Jn 4:14). Jesus also referred to this promise during the Feast of Tabernacles and assured the thirsty and believers in him that if they came to Him to drink, rivers of living water would flow from within them. It was a prelude to the gift of the Holy Spirit they would receive from the glorified Jesus (cf. Jn 7:37–39).³² For the Samaritan woman, realising the iniquity of her previous relationships

²⁴ Cf. Carrol STUHLMEYER, "Deutero-Izajasz (Iz 40–55) i Trito-Izajasz (Iz 56–66)," in *Katolicki komentarz biblijny*, 665.

²⁵ MR 973

²⁶ Cf. OICA 159.

²⁷ Cf. *Księga Psalmów*, 413.

²⁸ Cf. *Liturgia Horarum. Iuxta ritum romanum*. Vol. 1. Editio typica. Decima impressio. (Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1977), 38.

²⁹ Cf. OICA 157.

³⁰ Cf. Tomasz OŻÓG, *Pragnienie*, EK XVI, 239–40.

³¹ Cf. Pheme PERKINS, "Ewangelia według św. Jana," in *Katolicki komentarz biblijny*, 1131.

³² Cf. *ibidem*; see Bogusław GÓRKA, *Hermeneutyka inicjacji wczesnochrześcijańskiej* (Kra-ków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2007), 69–94.

with men became confirmation of the authenticity of Jesus' words. That is why she went to the city to announce a meeting with the Prophet, who answered her life's questions (cf. Jn 4:18–21). Recognising the desire of her heart, Jesus promised the water giving eternal life, which was linked with faith and baptism in the Church tradition.

In the second series of the prayers for the elect,³³ there is a supplication referring to Jesus' promise: *ut, donum Dei expectantes, aquam vivam, in vitam aeternam salientem, toto corde exoptent [...]*.³⁴ The theme of the Samaritan woman also returns in the prayers of exorcism: *ut hi catechumeni, qui aquam vivam haurire cupiunt sicut Samaritana mulier [...]*.³⁵ The second prayer of exorcism clearly indicates the relationship between a spring of the living water with setting man free from Satan's deceit: [...] *a perniciosis Satanae fraudibus hos electos potenter libera, qui ad fontem aquae vivae propinquant [...]*.³⁶

After exorcism, the rites suggest singing, for example, the same psalms which were proposed during the three scrutinies. Only Psalm 51[50] and Psalm 26[25] touch upon the theme of washing.³⁷ The latter Psalm is a lamentation of the persecuted man who came to the temple to seek asylum. He is washing his hands as the sign of his innocence expecting to be recognized by God (cf. Ps 26[25]:6). The Psalm encourages the participants of the scrutiny to show confidence in God.³⁸

The theme of water for which Jesus asked the Samaritan woman reappears after the catechumens leave.³⁹ Taken from the Third Sunday of Lent, the preface contains the words: [*Christus*], *dum aquae sibi petit potum a Samaritana praeberi [...]*⁴⁰ and emphasizes that he has bestowed on the Samaritan woman the grace of faith and lit in her the fire of divine love.⁴¹

The motif of the baptismal rebirth appears in the Second Eucharistic Prayer, where the intercessory prayers (also during the second and third scrutinies) include the following words: *Recordare quoque, Domine, servorum tuorum, qui hos electos suscepturi sunt ad fontem regenerationis.*⁴²

³³ Cf. OICA 166.

³⁴ OICA 378.

³⁵ OICA 164.

³⁶ OICA 379.

³⁷ Cf. OICA 164, 171, 178.

³⁸ Cf. *Księga Psalmów*, 189.

³⁹ Cf. Piotr KULBACKI, "Mistagogiczny charakter odnowienia przyrzeczeń chrzcielnych," *Roczniki Teologiczne* 63(2016), 8: 87–9.

⁴⁰ MR 228.

⁴¹ Cf. MR 228.

⁴² MR 974; cf. MR 976, 977.

The first of the two Communion antiphons, showing the fruits of the Eucharistic food, cites Jesus' promise: *Qui biberit aquam, quam ego dabo ei, dicit Dominus, fiet in eo fons aquae salientis in vitam aeternam* (cf. Jn 4:14).⁴³

2.4. The second scrutiny correlated with the Fourth Sunday of Lent (the Cycle A) focuses on the healing of a man blind from birth (Jn 9:1–41).⁴⁴ At the ritual mass, washing with water appears in the context of this pericope. Man is born without grace (original sin) and he has no vision of faith. A blind man could see when he was washed at the pool of Siloam at Jesus' command. The healing of the man whose blindness seemed irreparable aroused the anxiety among the Pharisees and scholars.⁴⁵ This pericope which was read to the catechumens showed the importance of washing with water in order to obtain the sight of faith.

The preface taken from the Fourth Sunday of Lent says about man walking in darkness who through washing is reborn to the dignity of the child of God: *Qui genus humanum, in tenebris ambulans, ad fidei claritatem per misterium incarnationis adduxit, et qui servi peccati veteris nascebantur, per lavacrum regenerationis in filios adoptionis assumpsit*.⁴⁶

Responding to Pharisees' accusations, the healed man said that Jesus had anointed his eyes with the mud and told him to go to the pool of Siloam – he went, washed, came back seeing, and believed (cf. Jn 9:15, 17, 38). The Communion antiphon refers to the healed man's words: *Dominus linivit oculos meos: at abii, et lavi, et vidi, et credidi Deo*.⁴⁷

2.5. The mass formulary for the third scrutiny, correlated with the Fifth Sunday of Lent (the Cycle A), is connected with the central theme of the catechumenate, the resurrection of Lazarus (cf. Jn 11:1–45).⁴⁸ The lack of hope for the restoration of life, when the body already started decomposing, was broken by the sign of power over the death given to Son by Father.⁴⁹ Jesus also showed his power in the sphere of restoration from the death of sin to eternal life.

Only the collect includes the theme of baptismal water in the context of the rebirth of the catechumens in the baptismal spring: [*electis nostris*] *renoventur fonte baptismatis et inter Ecclesiae tuae membra numerentur* [...].⁵⁰

⁴³ MR 975.

⁴⁴ Cf. OICA 157.

⁴⁵ Cf. Ph. PERKINS, "Ewangelia według św. Jana," 1148.

⁴⁶ MR 241.

⁴⁷ MR 976.

⁴⁸ Cf. OICA 157.

⁴⁹ Cf. Ph. PERKINS, "Ewangelia według św. Jana," 1151.

⁵⁰ MR 976.

2.6. After the scrutinies, the presentations of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer take place, on condition that they were not celebrated earlier. On the days immediately preceding baptism there is the presentation of the Creed, the ephpheta rite, the choice of the Christian name, and the anointing the catechumens through the use of the oil.⁵¹

The reference to the theme of water occurs only in the presentation of the Lord's Prayer.⁵² The verses of Ps 23[22] or Ps 103[102] were selected for the responsorial psalm which follows the reading from the book of the prophet Hosea (cf. Hos 11:1b, 3–4, 8c–9). Only in the first of them, the psalm of trust, the symbolism of water appears in the context of the allegory of the sheep extolling his shepherd who provides him with pastures full of life-giving food. God's concern for the sheep's food is fulfilled by bringing him to the water, where, after the effort of seeking and eating food, one can rest beside abundant waters—man can refresh his soul; God leads man to the waters of baptism and to the Eucharist (cf. Ps 23[22]:1–2).⁵³ The prayer for the elect said during the presentation of the Lord's Prayer includes the request that the elect be forgiven their sins, *per lavacrum regenerationis* and be accepted as God's adopted children: *ut, renati fonte Baptismatis, adoptionis tuae filiis aggregentur*.⁵⁴

3. SUNDAYS OF LENT

3.1. According to the practice of early Christianity, the faithful accompany the catechumens in their journey of purification and enlightenment during Lent, a time of conversion and penance. Regardless of the actual presence of the catechumens, the liturgical calendar provides for a penitent rite of Ash Wednesday, commencing the preparation of the faithful for the annual renewal of the baptismal covenant on the Easter Vigil.⁵⁵

During the period of celebrating the scrutinies, that is, on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sunday of Lent, the Church examines the progress of the catechumens in their preparation for the covenant, and also those who are baptized are obliged to examine their own lives in the context of their

⁵¹ Cf. OICA 181–207.

⁵² Cf. OICA 188–92.

⁵³ Cf. *Księga Psalmów*, 179–80.

⁵⁴ Cf. OICA 192.

⁵⁵ Cf. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 109–110; MR 96; P. KULBACKI, "Mistagogiczny charakter," 90.

fidelity to the covenant of faith.⁵⁶ That is why it is possible to prioritize the Cycle A readings referring to the great ancient baptismal themes: the Samaritan woman and the living water, the sight of the blind from birth, the resurrection of Lazarus. These pericopes can be read on weekdays after the corresponding Sundays as well. The liturgy of Lenten Sundays can also refer to the symbolism of water in the Missal Asperges, which is regarded as the memory of baptism.⁵⁷

3.2. On the Third Sunday of Lent (the Cycle A), the mass formulary gives the second entrance antiphon based on the Book of Ezekiel (cf. Ez 36:23–26), which is the same as in the ritual mass of the first scrutiny; similarly, the preface. The first Communion antiphon in the missal is the same as the first antiphon in the ritual mass (cf. Jn 4:14).⁵⁸ On the Fourth Sunday of Lent, the liturgy concentrates around the transition from darkness to the life of light. Just as in the formulary of the second scrutiny, the motif of the reviving washing also appears in the ritual preface and in the Communion antiphon (cf. Jn 9:11–38).⁵⁹ On the Fifth Sunday of Lent, the Cycle A, the liturgical texts do not refer to the symbolism of water and washing with it. Reference to water brought out of the rock is included in the reading on the Third Sunday of Lent of the Cycle C (cf. 1 Cor 10:1–6, 10–12).

Apart from the scrutinies, the theme of water returns in the readings on weekdays (cf. Tuesday of the 1st week—Isa 55:10–11; Friday of the 1st week—Mt 5:43–48, Thursday of the 2nd week—Jer 17:5–10, Ps 1; Monday of the 3rd week—2 Kg 5:1–15a, Ps 42[41] – 43[42] and in several psalms). On Tuesday of the 4th week of Lent, when readings refer to the water of life which comes out of the temple (cf. Ez 47:1–9, 12) and the healing of a paralytic in the pond of Bethesda (cf. Jn 5:1–3a, 5–16), the missal euchologion repeats the abovementioned entrance antiphon (cf. Isa 55:1) from the 3rd Sunday of Lent. The thought of drinking without money is continued in the Communion antiphon which quotes Psalm 23[22] discussed above in the rites of the presentation.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Cf. OICA 4; MR 973.

⁵⁷ Cf. Piotr KULBACKI, “The memory of baptism in the introductory rites of the Holy Mass,” *Roczniki Teologiczne* 62 (2015), 8: 57–70.

⁵⁸ The typical edition of the Missal contains the wrong sigla for this antiphon: Jn 4:13–14; the antiphon text, the same as in the ritual mass, only refers to Jn 4:14. Cf. MR 228 and 975.

⁵⁹ Cf. MR 241, 976.

⁶⁰ Cf. MR 245.

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The symbolism of water and washing with water in the liturgy of the catechumenate appears in liturgical texts only in the period of enlightenment and purification mainly in the context of great baptismal themes. This symbolism is taken from the biblical texts and is particularly highlighted in the conversation with the Samaritan woman. The texts related to the scrutines along with the mass formularies are correlated with the themes of the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sunday of Lent, and they are preparation for deepening this symbolism on the Paschal Night during baptism. In this way, the liturgical principle of mystagogy is fulfilled, the one which assumes the priority of the celebration of the sign over its explanation.

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SYMBOLIKA WODY W LITURGII KATECHUMENATU

Streszczenie

W liturgii przygotowującej do przyjęcia sakramentów inicjacji chrześcijańskiej dominuje zagadnienie przymierza, nowego życia, oświecenia, włączenia do Kościoła. Obrzędy liturgiczne przygotowujące do zawarcia przymierza w wodach chrztu wprawdzie wspominają o symbolice wody, nie jest to jednak temat główny. Przeprowadzone badania tekstów liturgicznych okresu oczyszczenia i oświecenia ujawniły odniesienia do symboliki wody zaczerpniętej zarówno ze Starego, jak i Nowego Testamentu. Dotyczy ona wody dającej życie na pustyni oraz prorockich zapowiedzi oczyszczenia. Także niektóre psalmy wykorzystywane w obrzędach liturgicznych tego okresu nawiązują do obmywania wodą dla oczyszczenia lub dla potwierdzenia niewinności. Liturgia kieruje uwagę na rozmowę Jezusa z Samarytanką i zapowiedź wody dającej życie wieczne oraz na obmycie przywracające wzrok niewidomemu od urodzenia. Symbolika wody zostaje szerzej rozwinięta podczas obrzędu błogosławienia wody chrzcielnej i chrztu w Noc Paschalną. Przygotowanie do chrztu realizuje zasadę mistagogii, zakładającą pierwszeństwo celebracji znaku przed jego objaśnieniem.

Słowa kluczowe: woda; obmycie; skrutynia; chrzest; mistagogia.